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BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN

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BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN

Second Series

BY THE REV.

W. MACKINTOSH MACKAY, D.D.

SHERBROOKE CHURCH, GLASGOW



NEW YORK

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BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN. III

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO MY AMERICAN READERS
WHO HAVE SO OFTEN ENCOURAGED ME
BY THEIR SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT
THESE STUDIES ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

PREFACE

THESE studies form a sequel to the Author's previous volume on the same theme. They are offered to the public in response to the request of many friends; especially those across the sea, who have found pleasure in the former series. This fact may explain to some readers why familiar 'Types,' especially in the New Testament, do not find a place here.

The Author hopes nevertheless that these fresh gleanings from an old field may not be without interest and instruction to Bible students.

He desires to express his indebtedness to the Rev. Kenneth B. Macleod, B.A., for kindly helping to revise the proofs.

W. MACKINTOSH MACKAY.

GLASGOW,

21st August 1922.

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BIBLE TYPES OF MODERN WOMEN

I

THE OBEDIENT WIFE

‘Wives, be in subjection to your own husbands . . . even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.’—1 PETER iii. 1 and 6.

ALTHOUGH I have taken up many a type of Bible Woman, this is the first time I have spoken on ‘the obedient wife.’ Perhaps the reason is that the type is not very common ! Luther declared that if he wanted an obedient wife, he would have to carve her out of a stone. However that may be, the Bible is pretty strong on the obedience of wives, and in the words of our text, St. Peter sets forth Sarah, the mother of the nation, as his Bible type of her.

At first sight, indeed, the identification does not seem to be very apt ; for the passage in which she calls Abraham her ‘lord’ is one that is more remarkable for incredulity than for the obedience of faith. ‘Then Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old, shall I have such a pleasure, my lord being old also ?’ (Gen. xviii. 12).

But when we look deeper, we see that Peter

is right. All through the chequered life of Sarah with its waywardness and its wanderings, there runs the golden thread of a beautiful submission to a husband's interests, in which she has been such a pattern to the multitudes of ' holy women ' who have in this respect followed her. For, joking apart, I do believe this wifely submission of Sarah is not such an uncommon phenomenon as we are apt to think. What has often struck me rather is the noble way in which many women ' forget their own house and their father's kindred ' in order to further the interests of the man they love.

But to return to Sarah. There are four places in which she comes into the limelight in the Bible, and in each of these she displays this self-denying quality of wifely submission.

I. We see her as *the emigrant's wife*, leaving Haran with Abraham to go out into a strange land. This must have been no small trial;—to leave her settled home and become a dweller in tents. Yet we read of no word of complaint from her, and the fact that God changed her name from Sarai to Sarah, the Mother of Nations, proves, I

think, that she must have played her part as a Pilgrim Mother and been sympathetic with Abraham in his obedience to the call of faith.

And, as I have said, Sarah has in truth been a mother of nations in that respect. How many a girl has to follow up her marriage vow—‘till death us do part’—by standing on the deck of some emigrant ship and watching the land fade away beneath a blue horizon—the land of home and kindred. I was reading over again the other day the story of Chalmers of New Guinea. He was a true Abraham, a pioneer of faith. But what about his wife? As I read of his restless wanderings from one mission station to another, I could sympathise with the complaint of his poor wife, ‘Tamate is so restless.’ Yes, she, like him, was a martyr too. She fell not by the spear of an Indian savage, but by an arrow of love shot by her husband’s noble faith.

II. Once again we see Sarah’s wifely submission *in her willingness to disguise herself as Abraham’s sister when famine drove them both into the land of Egypt.*

The proposal Abraham made to her at this

time was base in the extreme. One wonders that Sarah's love for him did not fall dead when it was made. It was nothing less than that she should allow herself to submit to dishonour in order that he might escape the assassin's dagger. It was a vile suggestion, and we can only wonder that such a man as Abraham afterwards became should have yielded to it for one moment. But fear of death had unmanned him, and perhaps he hoped that Sarah would escape out of the Egyptian harem ere the worst came.

It must have been with a sore heart, we say, that Sarah listened to her husband's abject proposal at this time. But love is a blind god, and she not only did not despise him for it, but willingly yielded to his proposal. The life of her dear husband was too precious to her to make her think of the shame she might incur by it. Besides, there was always a way of escape—the way of Lucretia.

‘Even here she sheathed in her harmless breast
A harmful knife, that thence her soul unsheathed :
That blow did bail it from the deep unrest
Of that polluted prison where it breathed :
Her contrite sighs unto the clouds bequeath’d
Her winged sprite, and through her wounds doth fly
Life’s lasting date from cancell’d destiny.’

Whatever her motive, or her ultimate intention in the plot, she was wrong—utterly, hopelessly wrong in yielding to her husband on this occasion. And this incident well illustrates how far wifely submission should go in yielding to a husband's desires and where it must find a limit beyond which it can never pass. That limit is set by the word 'Conscience.' 'God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the commandments of men'—even be that man the dearest and his life in forfeit.

Yet how often still do we see women too submissive in the matter of conscience. There is no place in which a wife has a more difficult battle to fight than in standing up to her husband in the matter of conscience. Many give way, as we can see from the reports of collusion in crime in the daily press. But do not you, my sister, if you wish to be a true friend to your husband. No woman ever did her husband a nobler service than when she was not afraid to tell him he was doing wrong. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Sarah would have been a nobler woman had she been able to say to Abraham at this time, 'How can I do this great

wickedness and sin against God ?' And yet you see how it all came out of her submissiveness. She called her husband 'lord,' even lord of her conscience.

III. Once again we see Sarah's submissiveness in the next great mistake she made, *the giving of her maid to Abraham as a subsidiary wife, in order to carry on her husband's hereditary line.*

It could not have been with anything but pain that Sarah would make this suggestion to her husband. Though it was done all round her, Abraham and she had been ever so closely knit together, that such a thought had never entered their heads. But as the years pass on and the promised seed shows no sign of making its appearance, and as Sarah watches the disappointment deepen on the brow of her husband and reads in his eye the unspoken question—Has it been all in vain then ? This emigration and visions and sacrifices—is nothing going to come of it ? I say as she reads this in his face, the desperate device takes form in her soul. Abraham shall not suffer ! Though it means death to her, he shall have a son. Take Hagar then and let not the promises of God fail through me !

Ah! it was all a blunder—a blunder due to her own lack of faith, a blunder that was to cause her many sorrows and stain her name with an indelible blot at the last—the stain of cruelty to poor Hagar. But this is what we too often do. As one has said, ‘Have you not sometimes used a means of effecting your purpose, which you would shrink from using habitually—a Hagar brought in for a season, to serve a purpose; not a Sarah accepted from God and cherished as an eternal helpmeet. It is against this we are here warned. From a Hagar can at best spring only an Ishmael; while in order to obtain the blessing God intends, we must betake ourselves to God’s barren-looking means.’¹

Yet sin as it was, it was a defect of Sarah’s qualities. It sprang from submission to her beloved’s interests, as she conceived them.

IV. Last of all, do we not see Sarah’s wifely submission to her husband in *Abraham’s Sacrifice of Isaac*? We are told nothing about this in Scripture. The silences of Scripture are sometimes more impressive than their speech. But that such a sacrifice was

¹ Dr. Marcus Dods’ *Expositor’s Bible*—*Genesis*, p. 150.

hers I have little doubt. Sarah was not a woman to be easily deceived, even had Abraham been the man to deceive her. Their hearts had been too long united for a secret like that to get between them;—without, at least, a dreadful suspicion filling Sarah's mind with a pain beyond words to imagine.

We must remember human sacrifices were going on all around Abraham's tents at this time. Knowing Abraham's devotedness to God, Sarah could feel little wonder that he should sacrifice the very dearest thing he had if his conscience told him to do so. When, therefore, she discerns him on that gray morning, leaving the tent with Isaac convulsively gripped by his hand, and a servant or two carrying wood for a sacrifice, but no lamb—oh, if he did not tell her before, the dreadful truth must have now dawned upon her mind! 'He is going to take my boy, my darling boy, the one and only child of my old age and give him to Jehovah!' What an agony of soul must have pierced through her soul! She was in that hour, in truth, the Mary of the Old Testament. The sword was passing through her heart, as she saw them both fade away in the distance,

going toward that solemn height of Mount Moriah.

Yet there is no word of complaint. She does not follow them along the way screaming in agony. She does not attempt to outwit her lord as Rebekah might have done. No, 'she calls him lord' even in that sad hour. There is an old Jewish tradition that she died after it; that when Abraham and Isaac came back on the third day, they found her either dying or dead—of a broken heart. Yes, we speak of Abraham's faith in the sacrifice of Isaac as a noble one; but what of Sarah's? Was there no sacrifice there? Was not her faith in her husband even in this terrible trial almost as beautiful in its way as Abraham's faith in God? With all her faults, and I freely admit them, is there not something fine in the character of this much misunderstood heroine of the Old Testament? Is she not a pattern, as St. Peter says, for wives in all ages—in her sacrificial submission?

Of course, Sarah is a true Eastern. Western women cannot copy her to the letter. In this matter

'East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.'

Yet in spite of longitudinal distinctions, I am old-fashioned enough to believe that in this matter Sarah has an eternal lesson to teach us.

As one has well said, the New Testament conception of marriage is 'two lives fused into one.' 'Where this unity of life is absent, there are two individualities set over against each other in every home, and where that takes place, there is self-assertion and the strain which self-assertion involves. A merely legal bond is a fetter—the bond which is made by the unity of interest; but affection is a silken chain, to draw husband and wife within the circle of a higher life and a fuller joy.' ¹

There is thus something eternally true in the Apostle's injunction, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.' A good wife has to throw herself into her husband's life and do all she can to further his aims else she is no true helpmeet. But is she on that account his slave? Far from it. She is her husband's queen. Love crowns her with a royalty she could never have won by fear or force.

¹ Dr. D. M. Ross, *Christ and the Home*.

I never use the word 'obey' in my marriage service, because it is a word which is unknown in the vocabulary of love. When 'maisterie' comes, as Chaucer says, 'sweet love takes wings and flies away'; but I always read the wise words of St. Paul and bid wives and husbands to live in that atmosphere.

Critics of St. Paul often forget the condition on which his injunction of wifely obedience is given—'even as the Church is subject unto Christ.' He couples the submission of the wife with a service on the part of the husband like that of the Church to Christ—a service kindled by the self-sacrifice and love of her Lord. Whoever, therefore, he be who is entitled to claim the submission of a wife, he is certainly not a tyrannical husband. When the first vow is broken, the second is abrogated. He who said to wives 'Submit,' said to husbands, 'Love your wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her.'

We cannot do better than close with the fine words of Jeremy Taylor, who in his *Marriage Ring* sums it up in a nutshell. 'Christ,' he says, 'is the president of mar-

riage. He joins the hearts. Therefore let the Banns of your wedding be first proclaimed before Him in the Court of Heaven.'

Where there is such a union, there will be no difficulty in a true wife saying Amen to the words of our text :—

' Likewise, ye wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.' As Longfellow says truly :—

' As unto the bow, the string is,
So to the woman is the man.
Though she bend him, she obeys him,
Useless each without the other.'

II

THE ROMANTIC GIRL

‘They called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.’—GEN. xxiv. 58.

THE chapter from which these words are taken is one of the most romantic in the Old Testament. It consists of a number of moving scenes, so fresh and artless in their old world simplicity, as to have an exquisite charm for us to-day who live in a society so different.

First we have the picture of Eliezer of Damascus, a servant of the good old school, who is as much interested in his master’s things as in his own. Standing by the sick-bed of his aged lord, he is entrusted with what is surely the most delicate task a servant ever had to do, that of finding a wife for his son ; from which we may learn the value of a good servant and also the way to it, that of being a kind master.

Then we have the romantic meeting with

Rebekah at the well, an example of the power of prayer; for it is in answer to Eliezer's earnest petition for guidance that the beautiful girl appears, who fulfils the sign he desires of God. It is not an empty one, we may note, but the evidence of a kindly heart, and an obliging spirit, giving the stranger a welcome to her country by offering not only him but his camels a drink of water.

Once more the scene changes and we are in Bethuel's tent, where we get the first glimpse of the crafty Laban, who was in after years to find his match in Rebekah's own son. He is suspicious at first, but is visibly impressed by the bracelets on his sister's arms; although it would be wrong to stress the mercantile side too far. The girl herself is obviously deeply impressed by the providential side of Eliezer's whole story. She is a devout believer in Abraham's God and feels, besides, the romance of the whole affair strongly stirring in her bosom. Hence there is a fire in her eye and an alacrity in her movements as she runs to her mother to tell her the wonderful news of the morning. And when her parents give their consent her joy knows no bounds. She falls in love with her un-

known bridegroom as genuinely as if she had seen him with the eye. And when on the morning her parents ask her if she is willing to go away that very day to wed with Isaac, she gives the decided answer, 'I will go'; in which we see coming out thus early that courage and decision of character which were to make her in after years emphatically the better-half of Isaac's household.

And then last of all there is the incomparable eventide scene, in which on that night, now so far away, Isaac goes forth to meditate in the fields and gets the first glimpse of her who was afterwards to be the mother and the moulder of one of the greatest nations on the face of the earth.

The whole chapter is, I say, steeped in romance, and in Rebekah's standing at the door of her mother's tent and saying with a fearless look in her eye, '*I will go,*' we have a fine example of a type of womanhood which has been common in all the ages of the world's history, *the Romantic Girl*, the woman of imagination who is fired by the distant and the difficult and is not afraid to adventure great things for an idea or an ideal.

Romance is, of course, common to both the

sexes, and in no country more than in Scotland. It has often been remarked as a curious thing that though the Scot is proverbially hard-headed, he is capable of doing the most romantic things. We see that in many an ancient event and modern man. Perhaps there is no more remarkable case of the power of romance in human life than in Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson was a veritable child of romance from the earliest days when he peopled his little bed with 'battles in the counterpane,' to the last quick summons in far Samoa, which brought the 'hunter home from the hill.'

But while thus romance plays a great part in 'the human soaring boy,' it plays a still greater in the dreamy imaginative girl. Sometimes, like Joan of Arc or Florence Nightingale, it may lead to noble heights of glory and sacrifice, but at other times it may prove a very dangerous gift indeed, as the story of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* proves.

The life of a girl is a finer, more beautiful, but also more fragile, piece of clay than that of a man, and therefore it is the more easy to be marred if not broken by the vicissitudes of fortune. Now the story of Rebekah

teaches us a fine lesson as to the value and the control of the romantic in human life. Looking at her response to the invitation of Eliezer in our text, we note three elements in her decision which should mark and guide the romantic girl in her actions still.

It was *prudent* ; it was *pious* ; and it was *prompt*.

I. *Rebekah's decision was a prudent one.* She consulted her parents before she made it. Although she was evidently captivated by the romance of the whole thing, although she felt all the thrill which a girl feels when she gets her first proposal, although the bracelets and the nose-ring (which in the East was like our engagement ring) had evidently made a deep impression on her mind, yet she is not foolish enough to forget what she owes to her parents. She has no thought of a Gretna Green before her mind. Her first thought is her mother. She ran and told her mother what had happened.

Now that was prudent, and I hope that that is what you young people, both young men and maidens will do, before you make up your minds to any great change in your

life. I have always felt that parents should not interfere too much in the lives of their children, especially in their love-affairs. I agree with the novelists and the poets there. Nevertheless, it is always well to consult your dearest friends, specially if you are a girl. Remember that a girl cannot be expected to know about a man in the same way as a man knows about a girl. 'A good bird usually comes from a good nest' was the maxim on which Eliezer acted, though he had more to go on than that.

But a girl rarely knows much about the nest from which a man has come; and even if she did, home education does not mean so much for him as it does for her. You have to know the man in his daily life, among his male friends, in his business transactions, before you can speak with any confidence about your Eliezer. Now it is there that a mother and a father and a brother can help. Laban and Bethuel could test Eliezer's statements with an experience to which Rebekah, clever as she was, could never pretend. Above all, they could look at the affair in the dry light of Realism; while Rebekah's vision was blurred by Romance.

For though Romance is a noble inspiration, she is a poor guide. We need more than imagination to show us the path of life, we need common sense as well, and that Rebekah gained in the wisdom and experience of her friends. She was a romantic girl, but she was a prudent one also.

II. Then, in the second place, Rebekah's Romanticism *was pious as well as prudent*.

She was evidently deeply impressed with the Divine Providence in the whole occurrence. That she was a religious woman with all her defects is apparent from her whole after life. She preferred Jacob to Esau, not merely, as has been usually thought, because she liked him better, but because the Divine Oracle had already said to her: 'The elder shall serve the younger.' And the latest words that are recorded from her lips are a cry of detestation of the godless lives of the daughters of Heth among whom she lived, and of abhorrence at the thought that her Jacob, the child of the Covenant, should wed one of these.

We have therefore every reason to believe that she had heard of the story of the first

Pilgrim Father with feelings of romantic admiration. She believed in Abraham as a very noble man, and now that the call had come to her to join her life and fortunes with this new venture in the history of faith, she does not hesitate for one moment. 'Wilt thou go with this man?' and she answered: 'I will go.'

Romance is always a beautiful thing; but I think it is never so beautiful as when it is allied with faith. Think of the life of Joan of Arc. What more beautiful romance was ever framed by novelist or by poet, than the wondrous vision which visited that peasant maiden in the garden of Domremy and which led her forth through untold difficulties to the deliverance of her native land. One beautiful afternoon during the great war I remember gazing on the splendid prospect which greets the traveller from the hill of Bon Secours above the city of Rouen, where the last chapter in that girl's romantic drama was acted out. As I looked down on the great champaign beneath me, I saw in the distance the noble cathedral in whose precincts she stood the cruel trial, then at the gloomy tower at the city's head in which, story tells, she was imprisoned, and last of all

at the market-place where her brave spirit went up in flame to God. .

Yes, she was brave ; but others have been as brave. What struck me most was the splendid quality of romantic piety which led her forth, a peasant girl, not afraid to face king and princes for the deliverance of her beloved land.

Sisters, and brothers too, there is a romance of faith. The romances of Christianity are some of the noblest in all the world, the stories of our numerous heroes and heroines, the David Livingstones and Mary Slessors whom a sanctified imagination has led forth from home and comfort 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' and die glorious deaths, and win for themselves a name and a fame among all generations.

Religion has thus been an inspirer of romance, and it has also been a sanctifier of it too. For as I have said, romance has its perils as well as its blessings. It often dazzles the eye with lights that are no better than a will-o'-the-wisp. It was as I have said with Hetty Sorrel. Her passion for Arthur Donnithorne led her far astray and brought her at last to a felon's cell. And it has been

so with many a poor girl, whose imagination, fired by wondrous tales of 'the King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid' type, have trusted to the promises of the false and the fickle and been led by the glittering robes of a false spirit of romance into the tragic realities of desertion and desolation.

Let your romantic spirit be informed by the spirit of duty; let it ever be governed by the monitions of conscience and it will become to you not a danger, but a deliverer from the dull sombre life in which your days may be cast, an inspiration bidding you read even in the commonest lot a lesson of fidelity and faith and courage.

III. Last of all, the Romance of Rebekah *was prompt in its acceptance of life's opportunity.*

When the matter was settled the rest of the night was spent in happy feasting, and Rebekah went to bed in the happy consciousness that she was now a betrothed maiden. But next morning Eliezer discharged a bomb-shell into the peaceful household by announcing that he wished to start that very day on his long journey home. Such a request

seemed preposterous. There was no time to get Rebekah's trousseau ready. Let her stay at least ten days. But Eliezer was insistent. His master was very ill. Every moment was precious. He might be dead ere he returned. 'Very well then,' said the mother reluctantly, 'let Rebekah herself decide.' So she was called, and without pressing her on either side, Milcah said: 'Your friend Eliezer wants to return to-day. Are you willing to go at once?' It was a big thing to ask; for a girl likes to tell her friends of an affair like that. She likes a nice send off, not to speak of the wrench of at once leaving her home for ever. But as she looked into the pleading honest face of Eliezer she felt how much an acquiescence so generous would mean both to him and to Abraham, and most of all to Isaac, and so with hardly a moment's hesitation she replies: 'I will go.'

It was a fine plucky answer, and the lesson it gives is so obvious that I need not press it home. Romance sometimes makes its lovers dreamy and unpractical, living in a fairyland of thought instead of inspiring to action and duty. It has been so with some of the most gifted men and women that the world has

known. They have seen visions and dreamed dreams, but their energy has ended with that and nothing has come of them.

‘Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,
Do noble deeds, not dream them, all day long,
And so make life, death, and that vast forever
One grand sweet song.’

Let me close by reminding you of another and higher betrothal of your souls of which these words have often been made the symbol and example—the betrothal of your soul to a heavenly and not an earthly bridegroom. Christ comes to you as Eliezer came to Rebekah and says : Wilt thou go with Me ? Wilt thou follow Me into that country where life and immortality await you, the country of the good and the true and the faithful ? What is to be your response to that appeal ? Oh ! let it be as prompt as Rebekah’s was ; saying to Christ the true Bridegroom of your soul, ‘ Yea, Lord, I will go. I will follow Thee, whithersoever Thou goest.’

III

THE SOULLESS BEAUTY

‘Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.’—
GEN. xxix. 20.

‘RACHEL,’ says Dr. Horton in his fine studies of Hebrew womanhood, ‘belongs to that class of woman who is beautiful and attractive, but devoid of those deeper qualities which ought to engage the affections of men.’¹ A close study of her brief life confirms this judgment. Rachel was in fact only a beautiful doll. She was one of those ‘faultily faultless,’ ‘splendidly null’ types of womanhood, which Anthony Trollope has described in *Grizelda Grantly*.

This magnificent beauty, says Trollope, had no mind above the decoration of her person. Her conversation was contemptible, amounting to little more than a frigid ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ But she had such a peerless face, she carried herself with such grace, she kept

¹ *Women of the Old Testament*, p. 48.

her admirers so effectively yet so adoringly at arm's length, that she became the success of the season, the cynosure of the London drawing-rooms.

Such in her own humbler sphere was Rachel, the shepherdess of Haran. We never hear of a single remark coming from her lips that is other than petty or petulant. Her religion is a superstition. Her love less a passion than a passivity. She betrays no strong desire for anything but a child ; and this seemingly because of her jealousy of her sister. Yet spite of all her intellectual vacuity she retains her hold of her lover's affections. The constancy of seven years' courtship is followed by the fidelity of a life. Nay, death does not part them ; for when the old man Israel is lying on his deathbed, her image is with him still. ' As for me,' he cries, breaking off from a totally different subject, ' As for me, Rachel died by me and I buried her beneath the oak at Ephrath.' That lonely tomb at Ephrath ; in his last dreams he sees it still, sees the dear face, hidden for ever from his eyes in the unresponsive earth.

Let us look at the woman who inspired

this wonderful affection, the most striking perhaps in the Old Testament. She has surely lessons to teach us still—men as well as women.

I. First of all, we learn from Rachel how wonderful is *the power of woman's beauty*.

“Was this the face?” asks the poet of Helen of Troy, “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships, And burned the topmost towers of Ilion?”

Yes, there is a mighty power in a woman's face. We may wonder why it should be so; that the contour of a nose, the shape of a mouth, the colour of an eye, should mean so much. But it is thus we are made; fashioned by the Creator so that we should love beautiful things, and that by means of this love life should be ennobled, poetry should be created, romance should be inspired.

Jacob's affection for Rachel seems to have been a case of love at first sight. After watering her flocks, he appears to have rushed into her astonished arms, pouring out in tears his story of loneliness and sorrow. Rachel took it all very coolly; though we may believe she was quite sympathetic in her calm and gentle way.

THE SOULLESS BEAUTY

But as soon as she could extricate herself from the ardent boy, she goes straight to her father and tells him the wondrous tale. That astute financier sees his way to making a good bargain, and after testing his man by a month's apprenticeship, binds him down to a seven years' servitude.

Jacob was clever enough doubtless to see through the craft of his uncle in all this. He could drive as hard a bargain as any man when he liked. But at this moment he has no mind for bargaining. He binds himself for seven years without a qualm; nor does the contract give him a moment's after-regret. 'He served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days, because of the love he had to her.'

Than these few words, no finer description of a lover's heart exists in literature. We see in them the very picture of 'the happy lover, like a man inspired,' going to his drudgery and making it a delight, feeding his soul for these seven long years with the dreams of hope and love.

How wonderful we say is the power of beauty! Let those who have it realise that it is a precious gift not to be squandered on

unworthy objects, but to be used as Rachel's was, to promote constancy and patience and toil, to inspire, as in the days of chivalry, the knight to his quest, the soldier to his conflict.

Beauty has too often been a dangerous gift, both to its possessor and to its victim, ensnaring the former by foolish fancies that lead to pride and go before destruction, or trifling with the latter so cruelly that life becomes soured at its spring and cankered at its root.

With all the defects that encircle Rachel's circumscribed soul, there is no fault of this kind to lay to her charge. She never 'trod upon a heart.' If love to her was little more than a great passivity, she was constant in her own small way. She too waited her seven years as well as Jacob. She too kept faithful, giving him a welcome smile every evening's fall when he returned home from his long day's tramp on the hills, and that smile in her lovely face and the light in her eyes kept him unwearied in his toil. 'He served seven years, and they seemed but a few days.'

II. But while Rachel stands before us as

a signal illustration of the power of woman's beauty and an example of its worthy use, she teaches us no less *the impotence of beauty when there is nothing more.*

I have spoken of Grizelda Grantly and the empty type of soulless beauty. It would be wrong to liken Rachel to her altogether ; for she had a heart after a kind. She was true to Jacob and did not turn him down when Laban became his enemy. Still she had enough in her nature to justify the comparison. She was a woman of no depth. She had no intellect like Rebekah, no religion like Sarah, no heroism like Deborah, no sacrifice like Jephthah's daughter. Her name literally means *the sheep*. It would be a compliment, I daresay, in a land where sheep were the great source of wealth ; but it is suggestive enough of her nature. It speaks of that sheep-like stupidity, that cow-like vacuity, which you see in Rachel and in certain women still ; creatures with no soul, beautiful to look at, but with nothing within them to inspire their lovers to higher thoughts and nobler ideals.

In the succeeding narrative we see how insufficient this fleshly dowry became in after

years ; the petulance and bitterness which overtook her when the trials of life came upon her. It must be admitted, indeed, that these trials were not small. We all know the base trick that her father played upon her and Jacob ; when at the end of the seven years, she was rudely thrust aside by his brutal selfishness and the bridal veil was placed upon her sister. That must have been a cruel hour in her history ; though Laban, no doubt, would mitigate its harshness by a promise of a later wedding. But how different now is to be her lot. Instead of being the undivided queen of Jacob's heart, she is now to share it only with an elder sister, and that one (though poor in beauty as compared with herself) who has, to an Eastern wife, the priceless gift of sons.

As for Jacob, I daresay he comforted himself more quickly. For one thing, he could not but see in the veiled bride thrust into his unwilling arms, a retribution upon himself for his own treatment of Esau. How like had been his conduct to his brother. He had disguised himself and stolen from Esau his birthright. So Laban had disguised Leah and stolen from him his bride.

Trials are less hard to bear when we know why they are sent. It is sometimes a comfort to say, 'The hand of the Lord is gone out against me.' What makes sorrow most hard to bear is often its mystery, its meaningless cruelty, the impossibility of seeing God behind it. Jacob had no difficulty in tracing God's hand in 'the veiled bride.'

And then, too, this veiled bride did not long stand between him and his heart's joy. Leah might be his wife in name, but Rachel was his wife in reality, whether he lived constant as a husband as he had been as a lover; for this was the noblest thing in his life, that he could never change in his love. On her gravestone he might have written with Kingsley—'We loved, we do love, we shall love for evermore.'

This should surely have been enough for Rachel; but her narrow, jealous nature found it far less than enough. 'Give me children or else I die,' is her cry of baffled motherhood, and when God will not give them she has recourse to Sarah's wicked expedient, without Sarah's excuse.

'Favour,' says Solomon, 'is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth

the Lord—she shall be praised.’ In the petulance and jealousy and dishonesty of Rachel’s later days we see how quickly merely physical beauty passes away. Something more is needed to weather life’s stormy seas, a character that is guarded by the breastplate of righteousness, has the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation.

Alas ! poor Rachel. Her end was sad. She died in the prime of life, as she gave birth to her second son. She is the first mother in history of whom such an event is recorded, and her sorrowful fate has cast a glow of sympathy over her memory that is perhaps more than she deserves. For there was nothing heroic in her last moments, and in the petulant bitterness with which the mother regarded the features of the child she was never to nurse, we see the same littleness as we noticed in earlier days. She called the babe ‘Benoni,’ which means ‘the son of my sorrow.’ She experienced none of the joy which a mother might have felt and her nurse expected her to feel when she brought the baby close to the dying eyes, the joy that ‘a man child was born into the world.’ She had none of the satisfaction that self-sacrifice

gives to the brave, the feeling she had not lived indeed in vain, but that she had given her life for another who would be a comfort to her husband in after days and a memorial of herself to future generations. All this was forgotten in her own little sorrows. He was 'the son of her sorrow,' and his future life was to be for ever shadowed by that remembrance! What selfishness! What littleness! even in the hour when most men and women grow great!

Much as Jacob loved her, he could not allow her dying wish to be gratified. He could not have his son bear a shadowed name because of a mother's death. With a fine faith he changed the name and called him 'Benjamin, the son of my right hand.'

It was a right thing to do and teaches us not to regard too sacredly the wishes of the dying. Life may be straitened, if not cursed, by too great a filial piety. Rachel had no right to call her son Benoni. We have no right to shadow the lives of posterity by conditions and exactions which they cannot fulfil without their grievous loss.

As things turned out Benoni was as much a Benjamin to Rachel as to Jacob. The

pathos attending her death gave her name and her grave a mournful interest in the history of her people. She became known, as Dr. Horton has well said, as 'the proto-martyr of motherhood.'

The pillar which Jacob set up over her was shown as an ancient monument in the times when Genesis was written, and now after four thousand years this memorial of an unfortunate mother and a beloved wife is still to be seen. 'Unto this day,' says Dr. Horton, 'the domed chamber of Ephrath still marks the spot where a beloved wife and sorrowful mother is buried. It was there when the sad heart of Jeremiah heard her still mourning in her grave for her massacred and exiled children. It was there when, a mile from the spot, the innocents of Bethlehem were done to death to satisfy the jealous fury of a king, and the evangelist fancied that he heard once more the echo of their plangent cries. St. Jerome speaks of it. The Crusaders tell of it. And "unto this day," Jew, Christian, and Moslem are all agreed about the site. The first sepulchral monument mentioned in history has been renewed from century to century so that the traveller of to-day can

still drop a tear on the tomb of a woman who died four thousand years ago.'

So what to poor Rachel seemed the saddest thing in her life was the thing which was afterwards to give her immortality, to make men think of her with loving thoughts. She was not a great woman by any means. She was, on the contrary, a very small-souled woman; yet for the sake of what she was to others, the wife of Jacob, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, she has been crowned with immortality.

But the lesson her life-story teaches remains. It is this, that the only love which is satisfying is that which rests on something more than beauty. Ibsen has a well-known tragedy entitled *The Doll's House*. It is the picture of a woman who was only a beautiful doll. At last her doll's dress falls off and her husband sees her as only a weak and wicked woman. And almost at the same moment as the discovery is made by him, the discovery is made to herself. She sees herself to have been hitherto only a pretty dolly and her husband as only a sensualist who treated her as such. The discovery burns up her love and she leaves him forthwith, passing

out from the light and comfort of the doll's house into the darkness but reality of life.

It is a tragedy which sooner or later befalls all human dolls. They get broken! We have heard of unbreakable dolls. Such dolls may be made for children to play with, but not for men to love.

We need more for life's drama than mere beauty. We need character and faith and God. Rachel was lacking in those deeper things, and as a result she passes out of sight like a broken doll, neglected if not forgotten.

Forgotten? Yes, perhaps by most of those who knew her, but not by Jacob. His love, as I have said, triumphed over every disappointment in his beloved and shone out unsullied in his dying hour. 'As for me, Rachel died by me, and I buried her beneath the oak at Ephrath.'

The fathers have seen in Jacob's service for Rachel a type of Christ's love for the Church. 'The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep.' He could say, in a deeper sense than the shepherd of Haran, 'In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.' 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of

the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.'

Yet to me, more wonderful in its similitude is the constancy of Jacob's love ; how it triumphed over every disappointment and was still strong in death.

How feeble, how unresponsive has our heart been to the Great Lover of our souls ! How poor is the return we have made to His long service and sacrifice ! Yet He loves us still. Time can never efface us from His heart or make His love for us decay. What shall we say in answer to a love so patient, so persistent, so unyielding in its long pursuit ?

‘ Halts by me that footfall ;
Is my gloom after all
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly ?
All fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest.
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.’¹

¹ Francis Thompson.

IV

THE WOMAN WHO HAS TO PLAY SECOND FIDDLE

‘And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?’—NUMBERS xii. 2.

MIRIAM is a type of those people who have always had to play a secondary part in the orchestra of life. Away back in the early days of her childhood, when Moses was but a babe, she had taken up that self-denying position. It was she who had saved him from death, when at the wail of the Babe in the Bulrushes, she had ventured into the august presence of the Princess of Egypt and brought the child's mother to be its nurse.

That, you will say, was no Second Fiddle to play—to be the saviour of Israel's greatest prophet. Yes, perhaps not in one sense, but surely so in another. For any of you who know anything of infants, know that you cannot be with them long without playing the Second Fiddle most of the time. King Baby

will always be monarch of the nursery, and if you do not accept his rule, he will let you know it in a very unpleasant fashion. So in these early days I see Miriam learning that part which she was to play all her after-days, the part of under-nursemaid to the child Moses, the master Prophet of Israel.

In the second scene in which she is mentioned in Scripture we see the same thing. It was on the morning of that great day in Israel's history, when as they stood by the Red Sea, they saw the sun of freedom shining glorious on the sparkling waves of liberty, tossing up with its billows the dead bodies of their oppressors on the seashore.

The sight had inspired Moses to burst forth into that splendid ode of patriotic faith, which begins with the well-known lines :

‘I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously :
The horse and his rider hath He cast into the sea.’

Then once more Miriam came forth to play her ‘Second Fiddle.’ She had not the creative genius of her brother ; but she had great executive powers. Give her the poetry and with her timbrel she could wed it to magnificent melodies. So we see her with

timbrel in hand leading forth the women in dance and song and making the words of Moses vibrate with martial music throughout the vast assemblage.

Had you been on the seashore of Arabia that morning you might have heard one of the grandest Hallelujah choruses ever sung by mortal lips. And as the singer of the song often gets more honour and money for it than he who made it, so I dare say Miriam got as much of the glory of that song as the man from whose mind and heart it had sprung.

Perhaps the triumphs of that day had got into Miriam's blood and produced an attack of what we to-day rather vulgarly call 'swelled head.' At all events, the next picture we get presents her in a less favourable light. A year or two have passed since that wondrous day. The people are now in the wilderness, ploughing their weary way through sand and blinding heat to their promised land. It is not all the pleasant path they have expected. There are frequent disappointments, and when these occur they do what others often do, place the blame on their leader's head. 'If we only had an-

other commander things would be different with us.'

And I am sorry to say Miriam joined in this insurrection. She had played the Second Fiddle now for a long time and was perhaps getting tired of the part. Nor was it rendered easier by Moses' wife, a Midianite, of whom she was jealous and whom she despised as an alien. So we find her taking part with Aaron and even egging him on in the conspiracy which he made against Moses, saying, 'Hath the Lord spoken by Moses only? hath He not spoken also by us?'

I am not going to dwell on the details of this mutiny. Enough to say, that God taught her a very severe but salutary lesson. He humbled her pride to the dust. He made her to realise how great Moses was, how much she has to owe to his intercession; and the result was that she went back to her secondary position with a new humility and filled it contentedly to the end of her days, when at last God promoted her to a place of her own among the illustrious women of the Bible, none the less because all her life she had to play the 'Second Fiddle.'

Now starting from that I want to speak for a little this morning about those of us who have to play a secondary part in the battle of life. Miriam's constituency in this respect is a large one, and the temptations to which she succumbed at last are not unknown by many of us who belong to it to-day.

I. There is, for example, *the 'Second Fiddle' of sex*. The 'weaker sex,' as we call it, have often to play this part. Not, indeed, always or perhaps so often as it may seem. We have all heard of the wife who said, 'My husband may be the head, but I am the neck that turns the head.' The part that some women play to-day is not so much the Second Fiddle as the Big Drum or even the Trombone. Still looking at the great broad facts of human life, I think it will be admitted that woman has often to play a part of self-suppression more than her gifts warrant. There is a disqualification of sex for the highest positions of life still, and I suppose always will be. How many women, for example, have to sacrifice their interests and comforts to those of their husbands, their children, or their parents! How nobly do

many of them play that part, giving up often the dearest ambitions to minister to a father's needs or a brother's hopes.

Some of you may remember the beautiful lines in which Rénan dedicates his life of Jesus to the sister who had been the guardian and inspiration of all his early days and who died in Syria, whither she had gone with him to help him to write it. 'Dost thou recall from the bosom of God, where thou reposest, these long days spent at Ghazir, in which, alone with thee, I wrote these pages inspired by the places we had visited together. Silent at my side thou didst read and copy each sheet as soon as I had written it, whilst sea and mountain were spread at our feet. When the overwhelming light gave place to the innumerable stars, thy clever questions and discreet doubts led me back to the sublime object of our common thoughts. One day thou didst tell me thou wouldst love this book, first because it had been made with thee, and second because it pleased thee. . . . In the midst of these sweet meditations, the angel of death struck us both with his wing. The sleep of fever seized us at the same time. I awoke alone !'

Sometimes, again, the Second Fiddle is played by *a wife*; as was the case with Madame Schumann, the pianist and the interpreter of her husband's great, but then unpopular, music. A most talented musician, perhaps the most popular in Europe in her day, she married a poor and misunderstood genius against the wishes of all her friends. When she became very much sought after at great concerts, she insisted on playing these pieces of her husband, much to the dismay of her admirers. They begged her to give something more popular; but she persisted and persisted until she had at last played him into fame. When she died she had the joy of knowing that Schumann was accepted as one of the great ones of the world; but to my mind, more beautiful than any 'Nocturne' Schumann ever wrote, was the music of Clara Schumann's love, never faltering in its devotion to the melancholy genius to whom she gave her love.

And I need hardly tell you there are many like her; women, too, who have no geniuses to devote themselves to. How much we men owe to them! All honour to the Miriams of life, without whom many a Moses

could never have sung his song ! And may their worth be recognised by us ere it is too late ; ere we awaken to realise how sweet was the melody which floated from strings that are now broken in death !

II. Then, too, there is *the ' Second Fiddle ' of life's inferior gifts*. We have all of us gifts of some order, but not all gifts of the first order. Our talents are not of the creative or original class. Thus many of us are precluded from occupying positions we fondly hoped to attain. We fail to take the place that others do in the orchestra of life. The Conductor of the band passes us by and places another and younger man in the post, and at last we realise that this is to be our part to the end. Our lot in life is to play the ' Second Fiddle.'

Happy the man, who, when such a discovery comes, refuses to turn sour, but bravely resolves to make the best of what he has, saying, like the Man of the Two Talents, ' Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.'

' Lord *Thou* deliveredst.'—Yes, it was

Thou, Lord, who gavest me these, *Thou* who never errest, *Thou* who lovest all Thy children, *Thou* who knowest what is best for them to do and to be. *Thou* gavest me but two talents. Thou wouldst never have done so without a wise and loving purpose. Some one must play the Second Fiddle. Let me do so then with a contented and earnest spirit, knowing it is the Master's will and so must be the best both for me and the music.

That is how to play the game ! And I need hardly tell you where such a spirit is best to be won. At the feet of Him who said, ' Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' All the bruise of wounded pride, all the sense of mortification that makes this instrument so hard to play, would pass away if we got Christ's spirit into our hearts. We should then be able to take whatever place Christ assigns us, feeling indeed that we are unworthy of the least of all His gifts.

When Dr. John Cairns, one of Scotland's noblest ministers, was dying, he was heard to mutter, ' You go first : I follow.' It was

a common expression of his, when a platform party was filing out of the side room into the hall. It was an index to his whole life. He was always taking the second place, though none was more fitted for the first.

III. Lastly, there is the '*Second Fiddle*' of age. There is a period in life when we are all called on to take an inferior position. It is the time of youth, but it comes again in old age.

Young men have always to begin by playing the '*Second Fiddle*.' You cannot expect to reach a top position in a day. Apprenticeship always precedes mastership, and the way to good mastership lies through faithful apprenticeship. You must work faithfully for long and weary years often at lowly tasks and for wages which are humble, if you would reach life's great awards. These, you will say, are platitudes; yes, but they are platitudes which need to be emphasised till they become beatitudes—'*Blessed be drudgery!*' '*Blessed are the meek!*'—else you will never reach that capacity and character which are necessary to win the greatest heights.

Christ teaches us that also, when He says,

‘If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?’ The two great qualities needed to play the Second Fiddle well are earnestness and loyalty — earnestness in playing it as if it were the first and only instrument in the orchestra, but then also, and more than all, loyalty; loyalty to the first, not obtruding yourself so as to drown the music, but remembering it is your duty to support, not to lead.

It is by such discipline and such loyalties that character is deepened and prepared for the greater task that may lie before us in this life, and will certainly be before us all in the life that is beyond, if you are faithful here in that which is least. Let us prize then the discipline of the ‘lower part,’ realising that it is necessary to the development of our talent as well as to the perfection of our character, remembering that—

‘In lowly labour lies the discipline severe of human life.’

That is the Second Fiddle of youth, and then there is the Second Fiddle of old age. There is a day coming when we shall all have to play an inconspicuous part in life’s

orchestra. When the powers of manhood fail, the hand grows feeble, the nerve less keen, the Master will have to come to us once again and say : ‘ You have played your part long and well, but your time is over now. You must give place to other, stronger hands. You can no longer take the first position.’ You must go back to the ‘ Second Fiddle,’ or perhaps to no fiddle at all !

It is not a pleasant experience when such an hour comes ; but when it does, let us be ready to accept the inevitable cheerfully. Infinite harm is done to the world by men holding on to positions for which they are no longer suitable. And infinite harm is done to ourselves and our own reputations when we grouse and grumble because others take the place which we think should still be ours. There is a time to work and a time to rest, and when the signal to stop work sounds, we should be ready to come away cheerfully, saying, ‘ I have played my part, I have lived my hour. Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’

Above all, let us remember the ‘ immortal choir ’ beyond. This is not *all* the music.

God has another concert hall beyond the stars. Miriam was to find that. She never perhaps came quite to her own here. She had always to take a second place. But in the 'choir invisible of those immortal dead who live in minds made better by their presence' she holds no second place. -

Let us be faithful like her, and we too shall find that in the great choir above, who sing 'the song of Moses and the Lamb,' 'many that are last shall be first and the first last.'

V

THE GIRL WHO COMES FROM A BAD NEST

‘By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.’

HEB. xi. 31.

THE name of Rahab meets us here with a shock of surprise. To see a woman of her class ranked with Enoch and Noah, with Abraham and Sarah, with Joseph and Moses and David is indeed a curious thing. But was not this part of the reason? Was it not to show that faith is remarkable?

The faith of Rahab *was* remarkable for three reasons: first, because *it came from a remarkable source*; second, because *it did a remarkable deed*; and third, because *it led to a remarkable reward*.

I. *Rahab's faith was found in a remarkable place.* When we say of a girl that ‘she comes from a bad nest,’ we usually do so in a tone of finality. Little is to be expected of a man,

still less of a woman, when the stain of bad blood and evil upbringing lies upon them. Now if ever a woman started life with such a handicap, it was Rahab. To begin with, she was an Amorite, a nation whose iniquities were one of the causes for which God drove them out before His chosen people. Of their cities Jericho seems to have been the worst, so that when it was captured Joshua was commanded by God to decree its perpetual desolation. Yet it was out of such a morass of immorality that there grew the sweet flower of Rahab's faith. Her early environment teaches the truth, of which we can see many an example still, that faith is a flower which can bloom anywhere. It is not like these rare plants which are only to be found in their chosen habitats. No doubt it does more easily flourish in pure homes and Christian atmospheres, but it has often been found in dismal city streets, in sordid slums, and in homes reeking with blasphemy and impurity; and when it is found there, it has the sweetest perfume and the richest colour. You can be a Christian anywhere.

But further and still more remarkable, the faith of Rahab blossomed not merely out of

a foul environment, but out of a sin-stained heart. It has been said that the sin of Rahab was not regarded with such horror then as it is to-day. It may have been so; yet we learn from the Bible that it was always regarded with moral revulsion and social ostracism. It seems to have been so with Rahab. She lived alone. Her family had cast her off. She was a moral leper.

This has been the attitude of society in every age. Tacitus declared that if a woman had lost her virtue she was fit for anything, and Christian civilisation has hardly altered his judgment. Even in our day, when the code of morals has been so much relaxed, it still remains true that for a woman to be suspected of living an immoral life, is to destroy her reputation hopelessly. It is an unpardonable sin.

Is this just? I do not believe it true to say that any woman, however degraded, has committed the unpardonable sin. Far from it. Christ's attitude to this sin is a standing witness against its truth. We know how tender he was to sinners of this class. How he welcomed the tears and accepted the ointment of the woman of the city who was a sinner.

Nevertheless, it is possible to go too far in our condonation of this sin. Dr. Horton, for example, goes, I think, too far when he says : ‘ A woman is not like a man inevitably corrupted by sexual immorality. Fallen she may be, and yet in the heart and centre of her she may remain at least kind and unselfish and open to the sweet influences of religion. While, on the other hand, the man is irretrievably hardened by it and can find no place for repentance, though he seek it diligently and with tears.’

I do not accept that. Souls are sexless, and the amount of degradation this sin entails depends on other considerations than those of sex, temperament, and its complications with other spiritual maladies. Though Jesus was tender to fallen women, it does not mean He lightly regarded their sin. On the contrary, it was the awful degradation which their sin entailed, that made Him so full of compassion for them, and it was because that degradation sometimes made them more open to the message of repentance and faith that He said to them, ‘ The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you.’

It is, however, true that a woman, and for that matter a man too, may seem utterly degraded and yet have within her breast aspirations for better things. We have a pathetic picture of that in Charles Dickens's picture of Nancy in *Oliver Twist*. Though seemingly utterly lost, the innocence and helplessness and agony of Oliver Twist touched a chord in her breast that was silent long and gave out sweet music. So was it with Rahab. In her lonely life she began to feel keenly that she had taken a wrong turning. She longed for a life that was honourable and pure, and thus when the reports of a conquering Israel were wafted to her and her people across the Jordan, they did not arouse in her breast that fear and trembling which they did in the rest. On the contrary, they came to her with the message of a new hope. She saw in them an opportunity to turn from her old life and her filthy gods, to worship a true and a loving God who was holy and pure, and by faith in Whom she might find salvation. And thus in Jericho, even in Jericho, and in one of the lowest homes of the city, there was found one whose eyes turned to the East with a new

hope. ‘By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not.’

II. This brings us to the second remarkable feature of Rahab’s faith ; *it led to a remarkable deed.*

One afternoon there came to her door two men, whom her quick eye discovered to be spies. Their foreign accent, their Jewish features, at once revealed them as they had possibly already done to others. For they seem to have been in a pretty desperate case when they came to her, with the pursuers already hot-foot on their track.

Now had Rahab been what she formerly was, she would have at once informed against these men. Safety as well as patriotism pointed that way : for to hide spies was a crime punishable with death. But as I have said, Rahab was now a changed woman. She believed, as she beautifully says to the spies, that Jehovah was God alone in heaven above and in the earth beneath. Therefore, bringing them in without a word, she first gives them supper and then discloses to them that their secret is revealed ; ‘but fear not,’ she adds, seeing their faces fill with fear and

violence, 'I will not betray you. Follow me'; and so up to the flat roof of her house she leads them, and pointing to a heap of flax lying there to dry, bids them hide themselves beneath it till the night has fallen.

Thus it was that when, an hour or two after the authorities of Jericho had tracked the strange men to her door, she was able to meet them with a plausible excuse. 'The men are gone. They left me to go to the Eastern Gate. Come search my house and you will see that my tale is true.'

A good deal has been made of Rahab's deceit here; but lover of truth as I am, I confess I do not see that under the rules of war Rahab was to be blamed. We must remember that according to military law these men were liable to instant death, which they would not have been in time of peace. Therefore it seems to me that as Rahab had now gone over to the other side, she was entitled to do all in her power to protect her allies.

Whatever view we take of her conduct, we cannot deny her the praise of an active and energetic faith. It is this St. James lays hold of when he says she was justified by *works*.

Hers was no sentimental, dead faith. It was quick to act, energetic in its movements, risking life itself in its exercise.

True faith is always that. It is as the student at arms says, 'betting your life that there is a God.' Betting your life; that means not only believing it as an abstract proposition, but giving your life-blood as a counter in the wager that it is true. That is what our soldiers did, when for the sake of the cause of righteousness and patriotism they gave themselves in the Great War. They betted their life that it was right, and this we must always do if our faith is to be a living thing.

'Think not the faith by which the just shall live
Is a dead creed, a map correct of heaven,
Far less a feeling, forced and fugitive,
A thoughtless gift withdrawn as soon as given.
Faith is an affirmation and an act
That bids eternal truth be present fact.'¹

Rahab's faith was that. It was active, it was quick, it was gloriously daring. It was a living faith.

III. Last of all, Rahab's *faith was remarkable in the results to which it led.*

¹ Hartley Coleridge.

It led, in the first place, to the salvation of herself and her house from physical death. As she let down the spies from the window in the wall, she extorted from them the promise that they would save her and her family alive. There was faith even in asking such a request. It proved that she had little doubt as to the issue of events. The red thread hanging from her window was her signal to the outside world that she believed in the ultimate triumph of Jehovah's cause.

Her faith also led her to be *forgiving*. Her family had cast her off; but she did not forget them. In the hour of danger she overcame every grudge and associated them with herself in the common deliverance. One of the best fruits of a true faith is forgiveness of our enemies. If religion leads us as it led Richard Weaver, the notorious prize-fighter, to answer a man who struck him on the face, to say, 'Do it again, Bill, and *again* and *again*,' till the blood was running off his face, and his miner comrade stopped in sheer amazement, then we may be sure it is a real thing. 'If we love one another God dwelleth in us and his love is perfected in us.'

But most of all, her faith was remarkable

in that it led her to a *pure life and an honourable career* henceforth. Her faith, as Spurgeon says, was a sanctifying faith. Rahab the harlot became the wife of Salmon, possibly one of the two spies whom she had befriended that night and who afterwards retained the memory of her clever and brave deed and paid back the life he owed her by a love that was honourable and true.

From that marriage there sprang the royal line of David, and from the royal line of David there sprang the Saviour of the World. Thus poor Rahab, the muddy, the defiled, became the fountainhead of the River of the Water of Life which floweth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

It is a wonderful condescension that when the Divine stooped to become manifest in the flesh He should have taken hold of a root of so humble a type as poor despised Rahab. Yet, after all, it is in keeping with His grace all through. 'Grace abounding to the chief of sinners' was the motto of His whole Redemption, and it was fitting that, in being so, it should have stooped to the harlot of Jericho for its first beginnings.

There is no handicap in life too great that

the grace of God cannot make up for it. That is the lesson which this old tale of a woman who loved and sinned and struggled and believed and conquered long ago would teach us. Canon Webb Peploe tells in one of his books of a woman who once came to him in deep distress about her soul. 'Mine is a very peculiar case, Mr. Peploe,' she said; 'my temperament is most peculiar and my temptations are quite peculiar. I doubt if you have ever met a case like mine. I have come at your general invitation, but I doubt if you can do any good. My case is so very peculiar.'

'Well,' said Canon Peploe, 'suppose you tell that to God. Will you just pray after me,' and then he began, 'Lord, I thank thee for all Thy promises of grace and power to save, but my case is so peculiar that I cannot expect them to be of any use to me. My temptations are so very peculiar that Thy grace could never meet them.'

'Why don't you repeat this after me?' said Canon Peploe.

'Because,' she replied, 'it is rank blasphemy you're saying.'

'Just so; but is it not only your own

thoughts put into words? Is it worse to say this of God than to think it?

‘ Now let us try another prayer: “ God, I thank Thee that though I am a peculiar person, and my circumstances very peculiar and my temptations very very peculiar, yet Thy grace is very peculiar and able to meet my very peculiar needs in a very, very peculiar way.” ’

She saw the truth and went on her way rejoicing. If there be any like her, let them remember Rahab and go and do likewise.

VI

THE WOMAN AS TEMPTRESS

‘When she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death; that he told her all his heart.’—JUDGES xvi. 16, 17.

IN our study of Bible womanhood, I now come to a figure dark and sinister, which I would rather pass by, but which Scripture, with that fidelity to life which is one of its great characteristics, forbids me to ignore. This is *the picture of Woman as a Temptress*. The sacred limner gives us more than one example of this darker type of woman. He shows us such grim examples as Potiphar’s wife; Jezebel, the temptress of Ahab; and Herodias, the murderess of John the Baptist.

There are passages indeed in the later books of the Old Testament, and especially in the Apocrypha, where the writers seem to adopt an almost woman-hating attitude to the fair sex. Thus we read in Ecclesiasticus, ‘From garments cometh a moth, and

from a woman a woman's wickedness. Better is the wickedness of a man than the goodness of a woman.' ¹ This is sorry cynicism, and we are not surprised that the Apocrypha, with all its good points, should have been expunged out of the Bible when it descends to depths like this. Nevertheless the general attitude of Scripture is, as I have said, one of faithful realism. It holds the mirror up to life as it is. It needs no gentleman with a duster to reveal in it the true face of humanity, with its warts and wrinkles as well as its beauties and graces. On the one hand it shows us the fairest types of womanhood that you can see out of Shakespeare, and on the other, like that great dramatist, it does not hesitate to tell you the other side. If it has its Cordelia, it has also its Goneril : if it has its Ophelia, it contains also its Lady Macbeth.

Of these types of evil woman I have chosen Delilah the temptress of Samson as my theme to-night ; because nowhere is woman's craft seen in its naked cruelty more clearly. In her treatment of Samson we see how terrible is the heartlessness which a woman can

¹ ECCLES. xlii. 13 and 14 ; Mrs. Lewis's *Hebrew Original MSS.*

assume when she is debased. That is why her portrait is drawn for us at full length in the Bible gallery. She is put there as a warning to men. She is meant to teach those who are trifling with impurity what a danger they are incurring when they toy with her caresses ; what a dark and gloomy valley is the valley of Sorek at its latter end—though its opening is bright and flowery—yea, dark as the very valley of the shadow of death.

I. In considering the story of Samson's Temptation, we have to notice in the first place that *this weakness of his was not a new thing in the history of the great hero of Israel's Iron Age*. It was the resurrection of an old sin. Long before, he had made a false step by contracting a godless marriage with a Philistine woman of no principle. That mistake had brought him much bitterness then. Once more, he had fallen into the same sin, only this time in a much grosser form, by his intrigue with the harlot of Gaza of which we read in this very chapter. From her he had only escaped by the skin of his teeth, and his experience then, we might have supposed, would have cured him of his folly.

But like a moth he flutters round the flame again. 'After *this*, he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek.'

'Will my weeds come up again, if I bury them?' I once asked a minister, when I was attempting to reduce my first manse garden in the country into something like order. 'Well, perhaps not,' was the somewhat dubious reply, 'if you give them a *decent burial*.' It is so also with the moral weeds; but there is only one grave deep enough to hold them there for ever. It is the grave at the foot of the Cross. Only when the burden of our guilt rolls into the grave from which Jesus rose again, can we be sure that their power will have no further resurrection in our life. Only when our sins have been renounced at the Cross can we be certain they will not come up again. Moral repentance will not bury them. Physical fears will not bury them. 'After this Samson loved a woman in the valley of Sorek.'

II. Then, in the second place, note *the gradualness of Samson's descent into this valley of death*.

He does not give way to the temptress all

at once. His approach to her snare is gradual and cautious, until suddenly, ere he knows it, the trap snaps and he is snared for ever. The story is told in the chapter with vivid power. As you all know, it was in Samson's hair that his great strength lay. It was so because it was the symbol of that Nazaritic vow which had been the divine condition of the continuance of his gifts. His parents had revealed to him that so long as he kept his seven locks unshorn, the spirit of power would be continued to him.

This secret he had apparently carefully guarded. It was like the heel of Achilles, not to be revealed at the risk of his life. He had probably, however, dropped a hint as to its existence, saying, with a laugh, that if the Philistines only knew his secret they could easily overcome him.

Hence the Philistines' proposal to Delilah. If they did not know where his great strength lay, they well knew where his great weakness lay; that in the hands of an unscrupulous woman this tearer of lions was as weak as a child. 'Get hold of his secret!' they said to her, 'and we will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.'

It was a sum equal in our day to £5000 ; and a great bait to a woman like her, and she did not hesitate for one moment in accepting it. Milton's suggestion that she was moved by patriotic motives, like Judith, has no foundation whatever. She was simply a bad woman, and a bad woman has no heart. As a good woman once said to me, after I had occasion to read this chapter in church, ' I blush for my womanhood when I hear such a chapter read in the pulpit ; but still I am glad it is in the Bible, for it shows men the danger of going to a bad nest.'

Samson went to a bad nest when he passed down the valley of Sorek. Little did he know the awful danger he was in, when he spoke to that false siren at her cottage door and passed over her fatal threshold. At first, indeed, there was no thought of danger. All was sweetness. It was not till the second or third visit that her seductive wiles began to be felt. Then comes the subtle question — ' Tell me wherein thy great strength lieth ? ' At first Samson shows no sign of yielding to the flatteries of the siren. ' Tell *you* ! ' he says to himself ; ' I 'm not quite such a fool.' But on the other hand he does not openly

refuse her, which would have been wiser. Nor does he flee from her, which would have been wiser still. No; he does what every foolish man does. He dallies with temptation. 'Trust me!' he says to himself, 'I shan't tell her. But I won't say No to her, else she may cease to love me. No, I'll put her off with a make-believe. Bind me, then, with green withes. Fasten me down with new ropes. Sew my hair into a weaver's web.' Anything to put her off. 'Catch me be such a fool as to tell the little vixen the secret of *my* life.'

So Samson trifled with temptation: as men do still. 'Do you think I mean to ruin myself? No, I mean just to have a little taste of life; to indulge in sin in moderation. Do you think I am going to go on in this way always? Not at all. I mean first to see life, and then, when I have seen it, I will stop; then, like Shakespeare's Prince Hal, I will drop my Falstaff and, with a noble indignation, bid him begone.'

But have you noticed as you read this chapter, how Samson's trifling becomes more and more serious as it goes on? How Delilah comes nearer and nearer to his secret,

as she plies him day after day with her art ? First, there is the green withes. That is far enough away from the truth. Any man could burst the untempered fibre. Then there is the new ropes. That is getting nearer. Only a Hercules could burst these asunder.

But the third, the weaving of his locks in a web—ah ! Samson was coming dangerously near his secret then. His hair—his seven locks of strength—he could hardly have come closer than that. Like a foolish insect circling round the flame, he circles nearer every time until at last there is a snap and a life is out. ‘Thou dost not love me ! Thou dost not love me !’ she weeps, and her tears wash all his prudence away, and he tells her all that is in his heart.

III. And so that brings us to the third and last scene in the story of a sin—the *Tragedy of the Temptation* or the *Wages of Sin*.

We may well believe a considerable time would elapse before Samson paid another visit to the valley of Sorek. The terrible consciousness that his secret was in the hands of such a woman as Delilah must have

struck a chill unto his heart and prevented him going that way for many a long day. We may wonder indeed that he ever went. But our wonder is lessened when we see how men still will plunge into the same sin after having had the most unmistakable warnings that 'just once more' would be fatal.

'Just once more!' I can hear Samson saying to himself. 'She'll never be expecting me now. She can't be ready to entrap me all at once, even if she wanted. Just once more, and then I'll never see her again.'

Just once more! How often do we hear these fatal words still. Just once more is just once too often. So we come to the last tragic hour in Samson's fate, when the fallen hero sleeps in the arms of the temptress and awakens—to perpetual slavery.

'I shall go as at other times.' At other times—ah, that is what the sinner, the drunkard, the fornicator says still—other times, when I escaped all right from this den of folly—other times when I got out of it with but a scratch. Other times—but there is no other time now!

‘For he wist not that the Lord had departed from him.’ Yet, unconscious though he is of the change, his strength is gone. Ah! Samson, take a long look now of the green fields and the fair flowers of Sorek. Take a long look of yonder hills of Zoar shining in the blue distance of the Eastern sky. Take a long look at the face of Delilah. It is the last thou shalt see of them on the earth. ‘The Philistines be upon thee!’ Soon their red-hot bolts will be hissing their message of perpetual blindness into thine eyes, and all that is left to thee will be the darkness of the prison-house of Gaza,

‘Dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon
Irrevocably dark, total eclipse.’

Alas, poor Samson! Scripture contains no more pathetic figure than the blind hero, grinding at the mill, the scorn of his foes, the sorrow of his friends, and the bitter contempt of himself.

And the lesson he teaches is so obvious that I need not do more than name it. It may be put best in the language of the Latin historian, ‘*Optimi corruptio pessima*’; the best when degraded becomes the worst.

Woman may be to man either his guardian angel or his demonic temptress ; his heavenly Una or his false Duessa, his lighthouse on life's stormy sea, or his false light luring him on by wreckers' hands to the rocks of unbridled passion.

But mark the lesson, taught so vividly by Samson's fate. When a man is thus led by a woman's hands down into the depths of hell, it is because he has already paved the way by *bad* intentions. Samson's eyes were in a true sense blinded long before the Philistines had put them out. He had never been ensnared by Delilah unless he had previously befogged his spiritual vision by a life of licentious profligacy.

This is the punishment of all sin, but specially of this sin, that it renders its victim incapable of appreciating what is truly good and makes him attracted by the poisonous flowers. If you would escape Delilah's wiles you must clothe yourself in the armour of heavenly light. Blessed are the pure in heart not only because they shall see God, but because they can see the devil ! Blessed, because by the vision of the highest they can detect evil beneath

the fairest colours, can detect the serpent lurking beneath the bowers, and in answer to its alluring invitations can reply, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?'

VII

ORPAH: THE RELIGION OF MERE EMOTION

‘And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law ; but Ruth clave unto her.’—*RUTH* i. 14.

IN judging Orpah, we must not fall into the mistake which Cardinal Newman makes of her, when he calls her kiss ‘no loving token ; but the hollow profession of those who use smooth words, that they may part company with us, with the least trouble and discomfort to themselves.’ ‘Orpah’s tears,’ he goes on, ‘were but the dregs of affection. She clasped her mother-in-law once for all, that she might not cleave to her.’

It is hard to see how such a distinguished judge of character should make so false an analysis ; for the whole drift of the chapter shows that both of these young women were genuine in their feeling of sympathy with Naomi in her desolate condition. They sympathised with her deeply, and were both

willing to go with her to the land of Canaan. In point of fact they did go a part of the way, and it was only the earnest expostulation of Naomi that overcame the purpose of Orpah to accompany her and sent her back to her gods.

No : it would be wronging Orpah to say that she was hypocritical in her affection for her mother-in-law. But the difference between her and Ruth was this, that while she had a genuine affection for Naomi, *so far as it went*, it did not go very far. It ended in fact only in a kiss, when reason was appealed to against her emotions. After all, she said to herself, what could she do in that strange land ? It would be a most unpleasant experience. No doubt Naomi would find her old friends there. She too must go back to her own, where she was known and respected. Perhaps she might find another and more lucky husband than her first venture had been. And so, with a kiss, she said 'good-bye.'

Not so Ruth ; as she stands there at the parting of the ways, her emotion shapes itself into something deeper than a kiss. This is no time for mere kisses. There is something more resolute to be done. And so when

Orpah is preparing to turn away, she gives expression to the noble words, which form her vow (and on which I have already written elsewhere):¹ 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. . . . The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.'

Here, then, is the subject which this contrast of Ruth and Orpah suggests to us—the *place of emotion in life and specially in the religious life*. There are three attitudes we may assume to Emotion in Religion. We may give it *no* place, or we may give it the *whole* place, or we may give it its *own* place, *i.e.*, as the impulse to something deeper and more permanent. We may have the religion of Ruth, the religion of emotion, and something more.

I. Emotion may have *no* place in our religion. That is a type of character which is not represented here, but on which we may dwell for a moment, as it is by no means unknown in daily life. It is the type which

¹ *Bible Studies of Modern Women*, First Series, p. 229.

Mr. Richard Holt Hutton has cleverly described in an essay on what he calls ‘*The Hard Church.*’ ‘We talk,’ he says, ‘about the High Church and the Low Church and the Broad Church, but to my mind the most deadly heresy is that of the “hard” Church. That is the Church which has no emotion in it ; which is pre-eminent in its correctness of form and ceremony, which is immaculate in doctrine and deportment, but has not a spark of emotion in its whole composition. It may speak with the tongues of men and angels, but it knows not love. It is arid as the Sahara, and as dead. That to me is the deadly Church heresy. High or Low or Broad, I have room for them all ; but I have none for the Hard Church.’

Hutton is right, and history has proved that there have been no ages when religious blight has fallen more deeply on a country than those in which the Hard Church has predominated. It was so in the eighteenth century. With all its excellences, that century was the era of the *Hard Church*. I once saw a tombstone to a learned Dean in Exeter Cathedral with this inscription—one of the highest qualities, evidently, in the

opinion of those who remembered him:—

‘He was a stern foe to all enthusiasm in Religion.’

Think of that as a virtue in a follower of the Enthusiast of Galilee!—the man of whom men said, ‘He is beside Himself!’

In Scotland such ministers were called ‘the Moderates.’ We must not be blind to their virtues. They wrote, many of them, fine poems and noble books of history and philosophy; but in spite of all their culture, this must be said that ‘they wrought no deliverance in the earth.’ Their parishes became steadily more and more godless, and had it not been for Wesleyanism in England and the Secessionists in Scotland, things would have come to a most dangerous pass.

Emotion must have its place in religion. We hear people even still declaiming against revivals because of their hysterical exhibitions.

Not long ago I saw a letter in the papers from a clergyman in the East Coast of our country deploring the excesses he had witnessed in a church during a revival. As I read it I could not but think of the dull, dead-alive services I had often witnessed in some of these huge and empty parish churches

near him ; -- scenes which recalled Tennyson's description of the Northern Farmer :

'An' I halluscoom'd to's choorch afoor my Sally wur dead,
An' 'eerd 'um a bummin' away like a buzzard-clock
ower my head.

An' I niver knew what he mean'd, but I thowt he had
summat to say,

An' I thowt he said what he ought to 'a said, an' I
coom'd away.'

When there is no emotion in one's religion we may begin to suspect its existence or at least vitality. Emotion is like heat to fire. It is the evidence of it. Where there is no emotion, how can there be life? Must we not say of such a formalism, 'Thou hast a name to live, but art dead.'

II. But while our text reminds us that Emotion has its place in religion, it no less teaches us that it should not have the *whole* place.

This was the case with Orpah. She kissed Naomi, but she did no more. Her affection, genuine as it was, led to nothing practical or helpful. With the kiss lying upon Naomi's lips, she left her standing on the road. And in this she is a type of many in regard to religion. Their religion is one of mere feeling,

and therefore it disappears as quickly as the foam-bubble on the wave, 'one moment here, then gone for ever.'

The prophet Hosea describes it in his day when he says, 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? . . . For your goodness is as a morning cloud; and as the early dew it goeth away.' And a Greater than Hosea has painted it in His figure of the seed sown upon rocky ground, springing up 'forthwith' because it had 'no root'; but 'when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.'

Every revival of religion bears testimony to such types of experience. Among those who are genuinely changed in heart, there are always many who are a deep disappointment. They are caught up by the tide of the movement, and often make great professions of religion, but the work is not permanent. They are mere creatures of emotion, and, like Pliable, turn tail at the first Slough of Despond, returning bedraggled to the City of Destruction.

What are we to learn from such defaulters? Is it, as some say, that all revivals are to be discountenanced, and that their results are

wholly untrustworthy? Far from it: 'He that observeth the winds shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.' Better lose your whole granary if even one seed spring up to eternal life.

No; but what we should learn from it is this; that *something more* is needed in religion than Emotion: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *mind*.' Not with the heart only, but also with the mind. Faith is a complex of three mental acts—feeling, knowledge, and will. Without each of these no faith is healthy. If faith be deficient in the second, it will sooner or later fail in the third. If it lack knowledge it will fail in endurance.

In a fine sonnet Wordsworth tells of a rich cloud-effect he once witnessed when driving over the Yorkshire hills. The sun sank behind great cloud-masses, assuming the form of towers and minarets of burnished gold. It was like gazing at some heavenly city; but he ends somewhat sadly,

' . . . they are of the sky,
And from the earthly memory fade away.'

So is it with the goodness of mere Emotion. It is transitory, evanescent. It ought, there-

fore, to be the duty of every one who, as a Christian worker, is brought into contact with this type of religious experience, to try, so far as it is possible, to deepen it by leading it to some practical effect, either of confession or sacrifice, and thus make it something more than a wave of feeling, a sigh, or a tear, or a kiss.

III. Let us now pass to the true type of religious experience, as we have it represented here in Ruth, that of *emotion and something more*.

Ruth did not say much about her affection for Naomi. She did not give her a kiss like Orpah. She had not perhaps that power of expression which her sister-in-law had. It is not those who are most expressive of their emotions that are the richest in their possession of them. Still waters run deep.

You all remember how strikingly Shakespeare teaches this, in his contrast between Goneril and Regan and Cordelia as they stand before their father Lear, and, in reply to the foolish old man's demand for affection, testify to their devotion. Goneril and Regan cannot get language large enough,

they declare, to express how much they love their father ; and yet their language is spacious in the extreme.

‘ Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter ;

Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty ;

Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare ;

No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour ;

As much as child e’er loved, or father found ;

A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable ;

Beyond all manner of so much,—I love you.’

In comparison with this, the love of Cordelia seems poor and meagre. Her ‘ silent ’ love can only cry :—

‘ Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave

My heart into my mouth, . . .

. . . I want that glib and oily art

To speak and purpose not.’

So is it with Ruth. She says nothing of her love. She offers no kiss ; but she *cleaves* to Naomi. She turns her feelings into a high resolve of life and death devotion, which she was afterwards to carry out, through many a weary day of toil and sacrifice,

‘ as sick for home,

She stood in tears amid the alien corn.’

The lesson which she leaves by her con-

trast with Orpah, is so obvious that I need hardly press it home. The love that Jesus asks from His disciples is one that expresses itself in something more than words or kisses. It is a love that cleaves to God with the whole heart and mind and soul. This is the only love which endures. This is the only faith that will win His crown at the last.

VIII

THE MOTHER

‘And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.’—2 SAM. xxi. 10.

SEVEN scaffolds with their ghastly fruit hanging from their boughs stand before us on a little hill outside an Eastern city. At their feet, seated on black cloth, sits a woman with drawn face, her eyes looking strained with long watching, as she peers eagerly into the sky, gazing for the rain that seems so long in coming.

Who is this woman, and what is her sad story? for it needs no question to tell you it is a sad one. Away in the past, not thirty years ago, though it seems to her now an age, she had been a royal princess, the favoured wife of King Saul, the mother of two darling children—two of these seven whose bones

begin now to clatter drearily on that tree of death overhead. For years this humbly born woman, for the absence of her lineage tells you she was poor, had been the envied of all the girls in her native village. Her beauty had made her great, and her gentle loving heart had kept the conquests that her face had won.

And then came the terrible tidings of Gilboa's evil day. 'Ye daughters of Israel, weep for Saul who clothed you in scarlet, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.' How true of Rizpah ! The scarlet is now changed to black. The ornaments of gold have become fetters of iron. But for a time Rizpah fared better than many in the troublous days that followed. Her beauty pled in her favour a second time, and the powerful intervention of Abner saved her from the persecution that often attends a dethroned queen.

And then came David ! She had feared at first about him. But the chivalry of the minstrel King soon convinced her that she was in no danger there, and we can picture her retiring to some quiet village, rearing her children in health and beauty, humble in

circumstance but with something of that divinity which 'doth hedge a king.'

Until once again another and more terrible day than even Gilboa's dawned upon this 'Mater Dolorosa.' Will the famine never cease? Will the brazen skies never yield their tears for a land under the shadow of death? At last the grim superstition of those days suggests a clue to God's strange dealing with His chosen people and with a king who is 'a man after His own heart.' There can be but one answer: it is Saul and his bloody house. He broke the solemn covenant that Joshua made with the children of Gibeon long ago. Therefore is wrath upon the land; and not until a solemn reparation is made will the skies become dark with clouds again. So the embassy makes its way to the ancient stronghold of the Amorites. The elders of the city sit gravely upon the question. 'Yes,' they say, 'you are right. Jehovah is angry, and only one thing will pacify Him—the blood of seven of Saul's sons!'

David is vexed. Jonathan ever stands beside Saul for him! That love, which passed the love of woman, cast a mantle of

forgiveness over everything that Saul had done against him. *His* sons at least shall not be taken ! Not if it rain not for three years more ! But where else shall they be found ? Ah ! poor Rizpah ! It is now her turn to mourn again, and this time with a heart that cannot weep. Her sorrow is too deep for that. She will never weep again.

Let us draw the veil over that tragic day when the messengers of death came to her lonely cottage. When the last embrace of love was pressed and she fell fainting into the arms of friends whom sorrow had made compassionate.

But soon sorrow rouses her to action. She cannot save the life of her darlings, but she may, she can, save their bodies. She remembers how the men of Jabesh had saved the bones of her husband Saul from the contumely of the Philistines. She can do the same for her boys. She can at least give them a decent burial !

And so when the procession of death is ended, and the contorting limbs are quiet in their last long sleep, and the last rude sight-seer has made his way home to his evening meal, one lonely watcher remains. It is

Rizpah, the Mother. In the simple but majestic words of Holy Writ, 'she suffered neither the birds of the air to rest upon them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.'

How did she manage to do it? She, a frail woman without a gun or spear, alone? Briton Rivière, the animal painter, in a fine picture of this scene suggests a fire. Jackals and lions are easily intimidated by fire, and, protected by this, she kept her darlings safe from the ravenous fangs of hungry beasts by night. It may well have been so; but perhaps there was more in the fire of her eye, in the eldritch scream of her voice, in the wild frenzied gesture of her devoted love, that intimidated even the wild beasts and made them fear this fearless woman even more than man.

At all events so it was. Her devotion conquered. The bodies of her children remained inviolate. Soon the fame of her name spread over the land. When the King heard of it he gave orders that the bodies should be taken down and interred in a decent tomb; but this the Gibeonites would not permit. Jehovah must first be appeased. Not until the rain came down from heaven

could they be sure that the sacrifice was accepted. Then, as if God Himself was touched, the heavens became black. 'There was the sound of abundance of rain.' Rizpah's task was done. She went home to die.

To die; but not, like most of the dead, to lie forgotten. Wherever the love of motherhood is revered as something that is great and beautiful—that is so long as the human race shall last—the name of Rizpah will be remembered.

I. There are other pregnant lessons this simple story teaches us. It teaches us first of all, for example, *the cruelties to which a false conception of God may lead the human heart*. 'O religion,' we say with Voltaire, 'what crimes have been done in thy name!' '*Corruptio optimi pessima*'; and it is not too much to say that men have done in the name of God what they had never dared to do in the devil's. The chronicler of this ancient story seems quite to approve of this way of 'pacifying' an angry God. 'God,' he says, 'was intreated for the land.' I need hardly say I have no sympathy with that attitude of the story. No, we who live in

the clearer light of Christ can have nothing but abhorrence for a Moloch-worship that would paint God in colours such as this. If God were intreated for the land, it was not by the blood of these poor innocent lads. It was by the broken heart of the Mother watching there at their feet ! The rain He shed down upon them was the rain of His tears over a world that would not come to Him that it might have light. It was to put an end to such things that Jesus came !

II. Or we might further learn from this pitiful story *how a man's sins often entail suffering on others.*

Rizpah and her sons had done no wrong. Yet because of Saul's transgressions the doom fell upon them all. So still, a father's sin may bring untold suffering on his wife and children. Ask the doctors. Go through our hospitals, and especially our Lock Hospitals. Visit our alms-houses and orphanages and you will see how the iniquities of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generations. Sin is a hereditary disease, and its results are as far-reaching as tuberculosis and as ineradicable as leprosy.

As one has said, 'There are moral corpses in the streets of all our great cities, men and women wrecked by evil parentage. Like the seven sons of Saul; though dead, unburied. Alas! for Rizpah, who, not for six months but for years, has watched them. She cannot keep the vultures and the jackals off.'

III. But the great lesson of this tragedy is *the beauty of a mother's love*. It is that which lights up its horrors and noisomeness, making it even beautiful, as the sunlight can irradiate a fetid pool on the road.

Some of you may remember how Tennyson has made use of Rizpah's name to consecrate and perhaps inspire one of his strongest poems. The incident indeed out of which he builds his modern Rizpah is very different from that of the Hebrew heroine. One almost regrets, as Dr. Horton has said, that he has not taken his theme from the original, as Browning has so well done in 'Saul.' The Rizpah of Tennyson is a very different woman from the Hebrew mother. She is a poor old woman whose son has been hanged for robbing the mail and whose body has

been gibbeted up on the high-road as a terror to evil-doers. She has lost her senses in the agony of bereavement and shame, and is a raving maniac when her son is executed on the scene of his crime. When she recovers, her first visit is to the scaffold where already dissolution has begun, and the bones are falling on the roadside. Hastily she gathers these up, and hurries with them by night to the churchyard, where she buries them beneath its wall. For many months thereafter, when nights were dark, she paid a visit to this sad trysting-place; there gathered up a fresh bone or two and repaired swiftly with it to 'consecrated ground.'

The story is thus less exalted in tone than the Hebrew tale; but the genius of the poet has cast into it such a force of affection to make it well worthy of its name. It is the form of a dramatic monologue, in which the old woman, now dying, tells a Paris visitor the story she had long kept hidden in her breast.

'Do you think I was scared by the bones? I kissed 'em and buried 'em all,—
I can't dig deep, I am old,—in the night by the churchyard wall.

My Willy'll rise up whole, when the trumpet of judgment'll sound;
But I charge you never to say that I laid him in holy ground.'

She is sure Willy has gone to the good place,

'For the lawyer is born to murder, but the Saviour lives but to bless,
And the first may be last, I have heard it in church, and the last may be first.'

The lady, scandalised at this, replies that he was said to have died impenitent; but she answers with indignation,

'How do they know it? Are they his mother? Are you of his kin?'

If Willy is not in heaven, she is willing to be lost in order to be along with him.

'Do you think that I care for my soul, if my boy is gone to the pit?
I have been with God in the dark. Go, go; you may leave me alone.
You have never borne a child; you are just as hard as a stone.'

The words recall, and have probably inspired, Kipling's fine ode 'To Mother.'

'If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine, mother o' mine,
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine, mother o' mine.'

If I were damned in body and soul,
Mother o' mine, mother o' mine,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine, mother o' mine.'

A fine anthology might indeed be made of the things which poets and great men have said about their mothers. But my subject now must be more practical. We have seen how devoted and how successful Rizpah was in scaring off the vultures from the dead bodies of her sons ; but a mother's love finds a more useful, if not more poetic, task in keeping away those beasts of prey which would otherwise seize on their living souls. That is the task which the world needs from its mothers to-day.

Newman has written some nobly musical lines about his dead mother, which I cannot spare myself the pleasure of quoting. ' And now,' he says, ' now thy very face and form, dear mother, speak to us of the Eternal ; not like earthly beauty, dangerous to look upon ; but, like the morning star which is thy emblem, bright and musical, breathing of purity and infusing peace.'

If you were passing, Mothers, would your children regard you like that ? Happy is

the mother whose children will rise up and call her blessed at the last. Better than scaring the wild beasts from their bodies is that power which by holy example, gentle words, and patient love can buckle on the invisible armour of light upon her boys and girls as they go forth to face the perils and temptations of this wicked world. Of such mothers we may truly say, in the words of the old Jewish Proverb, ‘God could not be everywhere ; so He made—Mothers !’

IX

THE FLAPPER

The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.'—MATT. xii. 42.

THIS is a name given, as you all know, to the growing girl. It is suggested by the antics of a fledgling when it makes its first attempts to fly. Unable to keep up, owing to the smallness of its wings or the unskilfulness of their use, it flaps them rapidly in order to make up by speed what it lacks in strength. In this it is not usually successful at first; coming swiftly to the ground, and ending its flight with a scurry into the brushwood. By and by, however, its fluttering wings learn wisdom, and soon they poise in the air with that graceful speed which we see in their perfection in the swallow or the seagull.

The figure is a parable of the first attempts of a girl to take her place in society. These,

of course, vary much with temperament. In the sedate or the shy they are scarcely noticeable. On the whole, however, most girls and especially the most interesting ones, have a well defined period of flapperdom. This is marked by a loud and often artificial voice, an imitative manner gained from a close perusal of novels, and an attempt to engage in conversation which is often much beyond their powers ; with the result that they come to the ground with some terrible *faux pas*, ending in blushing embarrassment and silence.

Such girls, it must be admitted, are trying at first ; but their parents, if they are wise, are not too hard upon them. They know it is often by such mistakes wisdom is learnt, and, instead of frowning at their awkward attempts at conversation, they encourage them to take their part again in that society without which their education cannot be completed.

Is there any type of the Flapper in the Bible ? I dare say it may surprise you, but I venture to think the Queen of Sheba is such a type. People think of her as a full-grown woman because she was a queen, and because

‘she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.’ But to my mind she has all the qualities of a quite young girl—her freshness and enthusiasm and curiosity; and it is because she used these qualities so well that I venture to take her as an example for girls, but not for them only. In doing so I have the authority of no less than our Lord Himself when he riveted the attention of His audience on this somewhat obscure heroine of the Old Testament, saying, ‘The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.’

What, then, is there about the Queen of Sheba that makes her worthy of the imitation of all our girls?

I. First of all I notice this—*she was possessed of a noble curiosity.*

‘She came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the *wisdom of Solomon.*’ It was not the riches of Solomon or the glory of his kingdom that brought her. She could have seen these on a grander scale in Babylon

or Egypt. No : it was to hear the wonderful wisdom which proceeded from that mouth which could discourse so eloquently on all things great or small, 'from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall'—it was for this she went forth on her toilsome and dangerous quest.

There is a curiosity in the young which is dangerous. This is the curiosity which urged Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Many a young woman is led by this false curiosity into paths which end in a like result. They wish to see life. Good and well ; but what kind of life ? Putting down your nose to smell the gases of a sewer is getting a taste of life ; but what kind of life ? The life that ends in enteric fever.

There is a legitimate curiosity about the facts of life which some think should be satisfied. They hold that the Church or the parent should put into the hands of their young people a manual guiding them in regard to the essential facts of the physical basis of life. There may be a certain amount of truth in this ; but such a manual would need to be very carefully framed else it would do more harm than good. Certain it is that

the subjects with which so many of the fleshly school of novelists deal to-day are defiling to the mind in the highest degree, exciting morbid curiosity to its highest and inflaming unholy passion.

The curiosity of the young Queen of Sheba was not of this baser sort. It was that nobler spirit of inquiry which impels to literature, to science, and to art, and which is seen in so many of our girls to-day. May I invite my readers to join this higher company of womanhood that is interested in something more than pots and pans, than dresses and dances, than flirtation and folly? It is a path that will lead you, as it led our Queen, into realms of beauty and interest, which will make life richer and fuller. Do not be content with the knowledge you have won in school. Go on to build on that the higher and richer stores of wisdom and true culture. For this reason school your mind to read something more than novels. Endeavour, if you have time, to become master of one foreign language, and in this way you will be led to cultivate a literature different from your own, with beauties of its own, with a horizon perhaps wider and certainly different,

thus broadening your mind and enlarging its outlook. An inquiring mind is an enriching mind, and every one who sets out to visit the Solomons of other lands has cause to say, 'It was a good report I heard of thy land, of its riches and glory, but behold the half was never told of all the wondrous things that thou hast shown to me.'

II. This brings us to the second lesson which the Queen of Sheba has to teach girls—*the value of a noble admiration.*

When Solomon had shown her all the splendours of his palace, the throne of gold, the brazen sea upheld by its twelve oxen, the marble staircase leading up to the house of God, the Temple and its solemn and mysterious worship—above all, when he had answered all the questions which her curious mind suggested to her—answered them with the wisdom of a sage, the eloquence of an orator, and the majesty of a king—we read that there was no spirit left in her. Like a savage when he first stands on Westminster Bridge, she felt 'dumbfounded' by the magnificence of it all.

Yet with this admiration there seems to

have mingled no jealousy. On the contrary, there is a noble generosity in the acknowledgment she makes of it. 'Happy are the people,' she says, 'who sit at thy table and hear the words of thy mouth.' We all know how fatiguing it is, after a while, to keep on admiring the possessions of other people. Our adjectives get exhausted, and we long for a book and a quiet nook. But there was nothing of this blasé feeling about our heroine. She brought the freshness of a young unspoiled heart to Solomon's discourses, and we do not wonder that, when she gave him a parting gift of spices from Araby the blest, Solomon felt 'that there never was any such spices as the Queen of Sheba gave to him.' It was not so much the ointments that were sweet, it was the fragrance of a girl's sweet admiration.

But this quality of admiration is not only a rare charm in a girl, it is a most valuable quality in a woman of age and in a man. Goethe once said to Eckermann that he owed more to the quality of admiration than he did to almost any other faculty in his soul—the power of admiring, that is, what is worth admiring, and the power to admire it with

enthusiasm. And Wordsworth says, as we all know,

‘We live by admiration, hope, and love.’

The admiration of what is truly noble and worthy is one of the most inspiring qualities of the soul, urging it on to the acquisition of what it admires. Wonder is the parent of knowledge: admiration is the mother of imitation, and rightly does the Psalmist say, ‘Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.’

III. Last of all, the Queen of Sheba has a lesson to the growing girl *in teaching her that the end of all true inquiry is an acknowledgment of God.*

This early inquirer after truth ends her quest with a fine confession of the supremacy of the God of Israel. ‘Blessed be Jehovah thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on His throne to be king; because thy God loved Israel to establish them for ever, therefore made He thee king over them, to do judgment and justice.’

It is not uncommon to-day for girls who pursue the higher learning to find their faith

injured if not destroyed by the quest for truth. It is perhaps not to be wondered that amid the many new thoughts that are poured into the growing mind, there should be a shaking of old beliefs. Such a shaking may be good for you, if it ends in a more personal grasp of those 'things which cannot be shaken.' But remember that the Christian Faith has stood the criticisms of two thousand years, and that the greatest and wisest men have acknowledged the supremacy of Christ over all other teachers. Do not, then, lightly shake off the Wisest of all the ages, a Greater far than Solomon, Who is able and ready to answer all the hard questions that the most inquiring mind can put to Him, and enable those who have experienced His grace to say, out of a richer experience far than the Queen of the South, 'It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and, behold, the half was not told me. . . . Happy are thy servants, which stand continually before thee.'

Christianity can meet any honest inquirer better than any other system of truth. It

says to the youthful inquirer, ' Prove me and put me to the test, and see if I cannot give a better answer to the enigmas of your life than any other faith that has ever been known. Come to Christ only in the right spirit, and He will be to you a greater than Solomon, and send you home to your own country with a gift of faith and peace and joy which will gladden all your future days.'

I was reading not long ago the life of a gifted woman, a favourite student of Professor Clifford of Cambridge. Under the influence of that great mathematician, she resigned her early faith and became an Agnostic. But she fell into a decline, and, in the weakness and agony of disappointment and pain, she felt the need of something more than mathematical science could give her. From the far country of dreary doubt and barren negation, she took the long and at first humiliating journey back to Christ. She put to Him those hard questions which her bitter experience had suggested, and her life story tells that she found them answered at last. She died in peace, feeling that in her Lord and Saviour there was One greater than all the

Solomons of her day, and in whose teaching alone there was the satisfaction that her soul and mind demanded.

May such a quest and such a guiding be yours !

X

THE WOMAN OF HOSPITALITY

‘Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. . . . And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah.’

1 KINGS xvii. 10, 11, 15.

HOSPITALITY is a great virtue in the Bible. ‘Be not forgetful to entertain strangers,’ says the Apostle, ‘for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’ The reference is to Abraham’s entertainment of the three Hittite travellers. But never was hospitality more nobly exercised than that wherein the widow of Sarepta gave to the prophet Elijah, in our text.

I need not repeat the story. Let me rather ask you to concentrate your attention on this great quality as it is presented in this woman, and then go on to consider the larger hospitalities of our hearts and minds to which it conducts us.

I. *Hers was a hospitality which did not confine itself to its own acquaintances.* It was large enough to take the Strangers into its heart as well. Elijah was not merely unknown to Sarepta's widow. He was of a different country. His accent proclaimed him to her as a citizen of an alien land, a member of the Jewish race who despised her and her people as strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. Yet in spite of that, when the prophet asks of her a drink of water, she does not turn a deaf ear. She does not go on with her stick-gathering as if she had not heard him. She does not answer him, as she might well have done in these days of pitiless drought, 'Go and get water for yourself. I have had to go a mile up the burnside there to gather the few drops that yonder torrent-bed, now dry, supplies. Go up yourself and get it. I need all the water I can get for myself and my child.'

No ; without a word she turns to the house and gets it. The man is evidently sick to death with long travel. His face indicates a weariness born of fatigue and thirst. 'Can I refuse to help this poor passing stranger ? Nay ; my heart forbids such inhumanity.

What though he is a stranger ? He is a man of the same flesh and blood as myself. He has the same feelings, the same thirst, as I would feel. Can I leave him to perish, maybe, because he is a stranger ? Would I have others do to me as selfishness prompts me to do for him ? Impossible.' She arose and went to fetch it.

Hospitality is always a fine thing. It is winsome to be kind to the friends that come to see us, to meet them with a smiling welcome, when perhaps it is not very convenient ; that is a Christian grace as well as a sign of courteous breeding. But hospitality to the stranger, and perhaps even the undeserving, is better far. It is of the spirit of Christ. ' I was a stranger,' says the Master, ' and ye took me in.' To be hospitable to the poor and the unknown, to give food and shelter to those to whom we are under no obligation and who cannot return our invitation ; this is of the spirit of Him who said, ' When thou makest a dinner, call not thy friends, but call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee.'

In a church like this, which is constantly

depending for its prosperity on the advent of strangers within its gates, we should even from the lowest motives cultivate this gift. We should make the stranger within our gates feel at home ; welcome him to our seat ; even invite him to our house if opportunity occurs, and in so doing we will bless ourselves and help our church. Especially young men and women living in lodgings should be thus received into the hospitality of the church in which they sit. Were there more of this our churches would be more prosperous, and many lonely lives would be cheered and perhaps saved from the dangers and temptations of city life.

II. But once more, the widow of Sarepta shows herself a noble type of Christian hospitality in this, that *her hospitality was exercised out of the depths of her poverty.*

Her condition that day was truly desperate. She had left but a handful of meal at the foot of the barrel—but a few drops of oil in her cruse. Yet when the prophet bids her make a cake of this for him *first*, and trust to his word that the supply will not fail, she does not refuse it. She obeys his behest. We see

her kindling her little fire, kneading the little dough, firing the little cake ; and then, turning from the poor hungry little boy at her side, who has been watching the operations with eager eye, she hands it to the hungrier prophet.

How could she do it ? Ah, you say, she had faith—faith to believe in that wondrous word, ‘ For thus saith the Lord, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.’ Yes, she was evidently a woman of great faith ; she belongs to that noble record of faith of those of whom we read in Hebrews xi., that by faith ‘ out of weakness they were made strong.’

Yes, and is not all hospitality that is truly large-hearted dependent on faith ? When we receive a stranger to our home, do we not do it in the faith that he will be worthy of the welcome which we give him ; that he will not abuse our trust, but go out of our homes not only with a kindlier thought of ourselves but of his fellow men ; that it will make him better, braver, stronger, more able to meet the trials and temptations of a hard, cold world ; and that by doing this we shall be walking in the footsteps of Him who said, ‘ Inasmuch as

ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me' ?

Such hospitality is always rewarded. It usually is even in a temporal sense, as it was with this widow. God multiplied her handful of meal and her cruse of oil as Christ multiplied the five loaves and the two fishes, and she lived upon them for many days. We have often seen it so in common life. I saw the other day in the papers the incident of a man who was left a fortune because he had befriended an unknown stranger in the streets of London. Kindness, like evil, is a boomerang, only with a kindlier return. It comes back with blessings in its bosom.

But even if there be no such recompense in a material sense here, is there not in the world hereafter, where He who came to this world as a poor stranger, for whom there was 'no room in the inn,' shall say to all such friends of the poor and the needy, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me' ?

One of the most beautiful stories of hospitality of the poor to the poorer, is that given by De Quincey, when in the dark days of his life he was befriended by a poor girl

of the streets of London, and saved by her many a time from perishing by cold and hunger. One night he never forgot : he had fainted in her arms as he, the homeless boy, sat with her, his only friend, one cold night in Soho Square. ‘ Then it was, at this crisis of my fate, that my poor companion, who had herself met with little but injuries in the world, stretched out a saving hand to me. Uttering a cry of terror, but without a moment’s delay, she ran off, and, in less time than could be imagined, returned to me with a glass of wine and spices that acted on my empty stomach with an instantaneous power of restoration ; and this glass the generous girl paid out of her own humble purse at a time when she had scarcely wherewithal to purchase the bare necessities of life, and when she could have no reason to expect that I should ever be able to reimburse her.’

De Quincey never did reimburse her. Shortly afterwards she disappeared out of his ken. Nor was he ever able to find her in after days, though he often tried to do so. ‘ O youthful benefactress ! ’ he concludes his remembrance of her, ‘ how often in succeeding years, standing in solitary places and

thinking of thee with grief of heart and perfect love—how often have I wished that, as in ancient times the curse of a father was believed to pursue its object with a fatal power of self-fulfilment, so the benediction of a heart oppressed with gratitude might have power given it from above to chase, to haunt, to pursue thee into the central darkness of London, or, were it possible, even to awaken thee in the grave with an authentic message of peace and final reconciliation.’

And we may be sure it did, and will. The act of that poor girl will not be forgotten in the great day. Even in its embalmment in the amber of De Quincey’s stately prose, it has won her an endless monument.

III. But I must pass to speak of a third and larger kind of hospitality which we see evidenced in this story of the widow of Sarepta—the *hospitality of strange ideas and new experiences*.

There is, says some one, ‘a larger hospitality,’ the hospitality of new thoughts and unfamiliar experiences. It is more difficult sometimes to give a welcome entrance to these than it is to strange persons.

How often do we give a scurvy welcome, for example, to new ideas. We get hide-bound, wedded to old paths and old conceptions of truth. The Church is dying in many places because it is so churlish in its welcome of the fresh conceptions of God and truth which are beaten out by the clash of passing events.

And not less so is it with strange experiences. God comes knocking at the door in the veiled form of death ; and we start back and say, ‘ Oh no ! Not here ! You cannot enter here. Love and Death meet face to face as in Watts’ great picture, and Love tries vainly to shut the door against the strange unwelcome visitant.

It was so with this widow of Sarepta. Hospitable as she had been to the strange face and the strange request, she starts back at the strange experience. Death comes knocking at that cottage door, and as she sees the cruel hand stretched out to grasp her child—her frightened child who cowers there behind her robe—she starts back in anger and fear, against a God who had come to take her only treasure. ‘ What have I to do with thee, O thou man of

God?' she cries; 'art thou come to bring my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?'

These words evidently point to a conscience awakened by sorrow, a conscience awakened to a sin in some way connected with her son. Was she a woman with a past? Was her son a child of guilt? Was its father not he whose name she bore, but some other connected with some deed of shame, that she thinks has been safely buried for ever? It may have been so, and if so this man of God who is the prophet of a righteous, holy Jehovah, would be naturally identified with this visitation of death which brings her sin to remembrance.

If it was, she was yet to learn another truth, that God is not only a God of righteousness, who will by no means clear the guilty, but a God forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. The prophet takes her lifeless child out of her bosom; with sad and sorrowful eyes climbs up to his lonely oratory, and there prays such prayers as only the prophet of Carmel could utter. Below in the darkened cottage sits the widow, sitting dry-eyed and despairing, look-

ing back at that sin, so long dead, now risen to a ghastly resurrection. Hark! What noise is that? It is the prophet at length returning. With heavy steps and slow he comes. He is bearing a burden. Yes, it is the body—the dead body of her son. He has done his best, and failed. All is over.

But no! All is but begun. ‘See, thy son liveth.’ Who shall dare to paint the joy that floods that woman’s soul as she sees the light of life kindle again in her darling’s eyes. Ford Madox Brown has a fine picture of the scene. But, after all, imagination is the best artist here.

What a new joy now fills this woman’s heart! And with a new joy has come a new faith, a new God. The dark-veiled visitor of death has indeed proved an angel in disguise, revealing to her the very face of God. ‘Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of Jehovah in thy mouth is truth.’

What was true of Sarepta’s widow is often true still. ‘God’s angels,’ as one has said, ‘often come to us veiled in sadness and unwelcome forms. We think them our enemies, and even wrestle with them.

In the darkness, the struggle goes on and not till the day breaks do we find we are in the presence of God's messenger.'

Be hospitable to the stranger, my brother, and still more my sister ! Be like the widow of Sarepta, a woman of hospitality. Do not turn a sour face to the strangers whom your sons and daughters invite into your homes. If you do, you will only drive your boys and girls away to find entertainment with their friends in more questionable places.

And especially if you are poor and sad, do not turn away from the sweet ministry of hospitality. By doing so you will only further impoverish your life. Whereas, if you go out in your poverty to help to comfort the sad and hungry, to cheer the lonely and the erring, you may find, as the widow found, that you are entertaining angels unawares.

As an American poet has put it :

'Is thy cruse of comfort failing?
Rise and share it with another;
And through all the years of famine
It shall serve thee and thy brother.

Love divine will fill thy storehouse,
And thy handful still renew ;
Scanty fare for one will often
Make a royal feast for two.

For the heart grows rich in giving ;
All its wealth is golden grain :
Seeds, which mildew in the garner,
Scattered, fill with gold the plain.

Is thy burden hard and heavy ?
Do thy steps drag wearily ?
Help to bear thy brother's burden—
God will bear both it and thee.

Last and best of all, let us welcome the greatest Stranger, who comes to our heart's door and waits for hospitality there. Sometimes He may come in strange forms, as He came to this poor widow. But howsoever He comes, be sure in the end He comes to bless. Turn, then, not away from His knocking, as it comes to you, whether in the sweet invitation of His first appeal or in the louder knock of life's darker and sterner experiences. For, however He comes, He comes to bless. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.'

XI

THE FIRST GIRL GUIDE

‘Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.’—2 KINGS v. 3.

THE story of the little captive maid is one of the least amongst the thousands of Israel. It is comprised in four short verses, and is practically a record of only one remark. Yet spite of this it has a beauty all its own, and has engaged the affections and stimulated the imaginations of children, and more than children, in every age of mankind.

Sometimes a single remark is enough to delineate a character. It was so with this nameless heroine. Coming in the circumstances in which they did, these words of our text stamp their author as a very noble girl indeed—one of whom we would willingly know more and learn much.

I. For, in the first place, they show her to be possessed of *a remarkable faith in God, a faith which surmounted a sea of troubles*

that, in the case of most of us, I fear, would have submerged it altogether.

Her story was indeed a sad one, though in these cruel days too common. A few years before she had been a blithe child in her father and mother's home in the land of Samaria. Then on one awful night she lost her all. A band of wild raiders had made a border foray from Syria, which at this time was no longer in alliance with Northern Israel. They had surrounded the village as she lay asleep in her little cot. A cry of terror had awakened her. She had heard the groans of murdered men all around—perhaps among them, her own father's. Then, in the grasp of some cruel raider, she had been carried away from her home, now a burning ruin, and carried swiftly through the night to be sold as a slave in Damascus. Thus in one night she had lost all that made life dear—father, mother, brother, sister, even liberty itself. There she stands in the slave market-place of Damascus—a lone and sorrowful figure. Well might she have cursed the day of her birth, and said in the words of Carlyle—‘There may be a God, but He does nothing—nothing.’

Instead of this we find our captive maid still singing the Lord's song in a strange land. Although Jehovah had done so little seemingly for her, she retains her faith unimpaired, and, when the shadow of death falls on her master's home, proclaims that there is One before whom even the dread scourge of leprosy must yield its sovereign sway, saying, in the words of our text, 'Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.'

The faith she here expresses is surely of no ordinary kind. Cradled in adversity, it was maintained in solitude and persevered in amid the atmosphere of idolatry and worldliness. Think for yourselves how difficult it is for many a domestic servant in our great city to maintain her faith in God and her moral character unimpaired. No doubt she gets her Sunday nights out; but, unless she happens to have friends who are definitely religious, she goes to a church only to find herself alone and unfriended. How apt she is in such cases to give up the church-going habit, and settle down into a careless, godless life. The temp-

tations our serving maids have to face in the city are very real, and all honour to those—and thank God they are many—who in spite of them are able to retain their character and faith unstained.

Christian mistresses should do what they can do to help in this matter. They should take a spiritual interest in the captive maids allotted to their charge, offer them the freedom of their pews at the evening service (there is usually lots of room for them), and in this way make them see that they take more than a mere economic interest in them. I know it is not always easy to do this. Interference with their liberty is resented; but in many cases it would be, and I know is, welcomed. A girl, especially if she is fresh from the country, will welcome the interest of a kind mistress, and return it with a service which is more than commercial.

II. And so that brings me to the second fine quality in the little captive maid. *She was not only faithful to God, she was kind and loving to man.*

Faith in God is not always a synonym of

love to man. In the Jew, aye, and in many to-day, it is often conjoined with a narrow exclusiveness that refuses to see any good in those who were once its foes. If ever there was one who had cause to remember 'atrocities,' it was the little captive maid. Well might she have sunk for ever into a sullen bitterness of soul, that only rejoiced, when it was said of Naaman—'He is a leper !'

But far other was her thought. We may suppose indeed that her mistress had been kind to the lonely little girl. But if she had been so, her advances had been nobly responded to ; and when the terrible tidings began to be noised throughout the house, she did not hesitate to go to her great mistress and tell her that there was a way of escape left open for her husband, if only he had faith enough to take it—'Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy.'

I have no doubt it required no little courage to bear such a testimony in a great house like Naaman's. Was it not presumptuous for a little mite like her to suggest a

course of new treatment to the Lord High Commander of the Syrian Army? Would it not be regarded as impertinence; and if it did not eventuate in a cure, would there not be just wrath poured on the head of one who raised false hopes and occasioned a difficult expedition into an alien and half hostile land, and all for nothing? Better mind her own business, and be still.

But all such thoughts are countered and conquered by her faith. She never contemplates failing. She may be the means of bringing cheer to her mistress who has been so good to her. Above all she is doing the right because the kind thing, and so, in spite of all her fears, she reiterates her conviction, possibly in the presence of the great Naaman himself and his servants, saying before them all, 'Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.'

There is an earnestness and assurance about her words which was probably born out of opposition and contempt. It was probably this that so deeply impressed the servants of Naaman, for when, in passion at what seemed the studied insolence of

Elisha, he was about to go away in a rage, one of them was so impressed with the foolishness of such a course, that he did not hesitate to address to him the wise expostulation, 'If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?'

So the wondrous cure was effected. The flesh doomed to the sepulchre returned like the flesh of a little child, and Naaman came home in the radiant splendour of recovered health. What a happy meeting for his wife! But what about the little maid? There is a provoking silence as to what happened to her; and some have gathered from it, that Naaman gave no reward to his little benefactress, and like the chief butler forgot his Joseph.

But I cannot believe in such ingratitude. It is not like Naaman. His kindness to Gehazi proves that he had a generous heart. I cannot but believe that the little maid was rewarded by getting her freedom and being returned to such of her relatives as still survived. The very fact she is mentioned in the story at all is a corroboration of

the kindlier view. Otherwise there is no need for her being in the limelight.

But even were it not so, she had the reward which always comes from doing good, the sense of satisfaction in making others happy, the feeling that her life was not lived in vain, since it had brought sunshine into one sad home. I have called her the first girl guide, and I think she was that, for in the first place she was a guide to Naaman, a guide to him to those waters of blessing in which alone he could find healing. And in the second place, she evidently belonged in spirit to that sisterhood who believe in doing a kind action every day.

In this she teaches an undying lesson to all girls, and boys too; she shows us what a girl can do. How narrow were her possibilities. How hopeless her environment. But she had a big faith and a loving heart, and the result was that she did a deed which has made her to be remembered throughout all generations.

How great are the ministries that have often come from very humble people. To take only domestic servants: how much good they have often been able to accom-

plish in their humble avocation. The good Earl of Shaftesbury has borne testimony to the fact that it was to his pious nurse he owed his soul. Without father or mother to teach him, this noble woman brought him to the Saviour, and made him the great blessing he was in his day and generation.

The same is true of Alison Cunningham, the nurse of the most famous literary man Scotland has produced since the days of Carlyle. 'My second mother' is the affectionate name by which he calls her (though he had a good mother besides her); and he used to recall how, when he could not sleep, this faithful soul would lift the delicate child in her arms and croon to him an old Scotch song, or when he was more than usually restless would carry him to the window in the silent night, and point out here and there other lighted windows, where perhaps there were other rich children waiting for the morning.

It was to her he owed his life, and to her we owe the brave legacy of buoyant literature which has flowed from that sparkling writer. We never know what the least of us can do. If we have faith even as a

grain of mustard seed, there is no limit to the things we can accomplish. But faith we must have. Without faith it is impossible to please God or do any real good to our fellow-men.

Let us then close our study of this old Hebrew heroine with the prayer, 'Lord, increase my faith.' We may have but small resources, a weak body, an ungifted mind, an unattractive personality, a narrow environment. 'Just five loaves and two fishes—What are these among so many?'

'Never mind,' says the Master; 'bring them hither to me!' Trust in God and do the kind and loving deed to your sick fellow-man or perishing sister-woman, and in so doing you shall, like this captive maid, win a place among those who shall 'shine like the stars for ever and ever.'

XII

THE WOMAN OF COURAGE

‘If I perish, I perish!’—ESTHER iv. 16.

THESE are the words of a soul ‘at bay.’ They are expressed by lips of anguish. They tell of one whose fortunes are desperate and whose inspiration is born of despair.

You all know the story from which they are taken. But a few days before Esther had seemed the happiest girl in all the world. The chosen bride of the king of kings, the prospect of life lay before her fair and unclouded. But misfortune sometimes comes with tragic suddenness. A dark cloud suddenly hovered over her people. Her uncle had sent a message to beg for her intercession with him who alone could save them. But she well knew that such an intervention would be regarded as a mortal offence. For so great had the nuisance of such back-door petitions already

become, that a stern edict had been passed, that whosoever should enter into the royal presence uninvited, was to be ordered off to instant execution. True, there was one exception. The king always reserved the golden sceptre of pardon for him to whom he chose to extend his royal clemency ; but it was rare for him to do so, and as for poor Esther, she had little hope that the favour would be extended to her. For some reason, probably Haman's secret slandering, she had already lost favour. For thirty days she had not been called into her husband's presence. There was no hope of the golden sceptre for her.

This was the answer she sent to Mordecai. But if she hoped by it to win the indulgence of her uncle, she little knew the man. ' If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time,' he sternly replied, ' then shall deliverance and enlargement arise to the Jews from another place ; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed, and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ? '

In these words, as one has said, two great principles are laid down : ' God's cause is

independent of us ; but we are not independent of God's cause.' If Esther failed, God's covenanted nation could not be utterly lost. No weapon that was forged against them could prosper. But her family would perish, and, worst of all, she would lose the opportunity of saving her people. She would go down to the grave as a recreant to her father's faith, 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.'

Stung by these words, Esther makes the noble resolution of our text, 'I will go in unto the king,' she cries, 'and if I perish, I perish.'

Now I am not going to dwell further on Esther's story. I need not tell you, she did not perish. No one perishes on God's errand. She was able to win deliverance not for her people only but also for herself—a name among the great women of the Bible, who 'through faith waxed valiant in the fight, and out of weakness were made strong.'

But now, leaving Esther and her story, let us look at this quality of moral courage and all its importance in the battle of life. In recent days Sir J. M. Barrie has given

us a fine meditation on it in his Rectorial Address to the Students of St. Andrews.¹ The theme, indeed, is somewhat old and even trite, but Mr. Barrie has been able to say some fresh things upon it, and, above all, to light it up with some fine illustrations.

In especial, the letter he read from Captain Scott, the Antarctic explorer, written with dying hand as the death storm raged around him and his brave comrades in that lonely tent, must have been a moving incident. Let me read you some lines from that letter: 'We are pegging it out in a very comfortless spot. Hoping that this may be found and sent to you, I write you a word of farewell. I want you to think well of me and my end. Good-bye! I am not at all afraid, but sad to miss many a simple pleasure which I had planned in the long marches. We are in a desperate plight—feet frozen, no fuel, and a long way from food; but it would do your heart good to be in our tent and to hear our songs and cheery conversation.' Then later, 'We are very near the end. We intended to finish

¹ As Lord Rector to the University of St. Andrews, delivered on 3rd May 1922.

ourselves when things proved like this ; but we have decided to die naturally.'

That picture of these brave men singing songs of cheer to each other as the night of death deepened gradually upon the chilled limbs, until at last all was still—that was as fine an example of courage as ever the annals of our land (and they are filled with the like) has been able to show. Yes, as Barrie says, it was 'beauty boiling over' and sending forth clouds of immortal glory.

But while thus we admire that physical courage which inspired these brave men to sing songs in the night, and sent forth also so many of our soldier boys in the Great War to face the mud and blood of these terrible trenches without grousing, let us not think that courage is confined to deeds like that. It is something which is needed no less in the commonest things of the least romantic life. There is no quality more required in our everyday struggle to be true and earnest and cheerful. It is indeed, as one has said, the root of all things, and without it we cannot build the temple of character to any fair proportions.

Take, for example, the place of courage in *the realm of truth*. I speak not now of truth only in the lesser sense of that word, the harmony between thought and its expression in word or deed, of truth as it is opposed to lying or dishonesty. We all know how courage is needed there, how often to speak the truth means loss in business, unpopularity in company, sacrifice in friendship.

‘It needeth courage to be true,
And steadfastly the right to do.’

But I speak just now specially of the wider aspect of truth, the harmony between thought and things; the truth of reality, the truth of science, the truth of politics, the truth of religion. We are too apt to think that the acquisition of truth in these domains depends only on industry or genius. No doubt these qualities do largely make up the successful truth seeker. But there is also a moral side to the quest of truth. If we would win the truth in our search after her, we must be fearless of consequences; we must not seek only for what will please our well-established beliefs and prejudices;

we must not seek what will minister to our popularity or confirm our prepossessions ; we must follow the truth wherever she leads, and be ready to proclaim her at whatever cost.

A great French politician was once asked what was the highest quality in a statesman ; he replied, ' *L'audace, et l'audace, et toujours l'audace.*' What is true of politics is no less true of science, as Galileo found when he discovered that the dungeons of the Vatican were his reward, and as Socrates experienced when he took the hemlock cup into his hand.

In religion it is, I need not say, no less but far more the case. 'Ye shall know the truth,' said Christ, 'and the truth shall make you free.' Yes, the freedom of the spirit ; but not always the freedom of the body. Often truth, then, has had to be bought at the cost of imprisonment and death. The glorious army of martyrs is composed of men who were valiant for the truth. In spite of all their sufferings they are a merry company, for they know that they are never so near Him who was the Truth, as when they were adventuring their

lives for her. 'If I perish, I perish,' they cried; but I perish not sorrowful, knowing that though for a time truth may seem to be crushed, in the end it shall prevail.

'Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Falsehood ever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold rules the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God, an awful shadow,
Keeping watch upon His own.'

Again we see, and still more, the necessity of courage in *the realm of conscience*. Esther's temptation was to choose for herself a safe and easy inactivity, for though her uncle threatened her with death, there was little danger that she, a queen, would be involved in the destruction of her people. Often with us the temptation is just the same. It is to sacrifice conscience to personal profit and selfish happiness.

It is told of Adam Clarke, the great Bible commentator, that when a lad he was employed as a draper's assistant. After selling some rich cloth to a lady, his master came to him with an angry face and said: 'Adam, if you can't stretch my cloth, you'll have to leave my employ.' 'Sir,'

was the reply, 'I can stretch your cloth, but I can't stretch my conscience.' He did leave his master's employment; but a youth possessed of a moral courage like that, soon found his way, and he rose to be one of the great preachers of the land.

The battle of life is often fought on an issue of that kind. Temptation may come to you either like a siren with loving voice and soft arms, or like a roaring lion threatening destruction if you do not yield at once, and it is when we meet it in the intrepid spirit of Esther, saying, 'I will not yield, and if I perish, I perish,' that the soul wins its Waterloo and goes forward to do great things.

Or, last of all, there is the need for courage in the *realm of trial and suffering*. There comes a time in most lives, if not in all, when the sky grows dark, when sickness and pain invade us, when bereavement lays us low, when poverty takes the place of comfort and affluence, and we seem to be placed in a position from which there is no outlet but capitulation to despair and death. It is in such hours that there is most of all a call for courage. No one of us knows

what reserves of strength there is in the soul, until we put it to the proof and refuse to give in.

I remember once in my own life passing through a long and bitter experience of that kind. Months of ill-health had sapped all my powers, sleep forsook me, fears stood in the way. I was tempted to seek in drugs a fatal respite from nights of fear. In despair I went one day to see a great nerve specialist and ask advice from him. He was however out, and on the way home, despondent and almost hopeless, I met my doctor and told him what I had done. I shall never forget the answer he gave. 'Sir,' he said, 'believe me, no doctor can help you. You must work out your own salvation.' That word seemed to come from heaven. I went home resolved to begin the battle afresh, and to trust in no man but God; and with no other medicine than a frequent dose of the ninety-first psalm, I was able to trace my way through the valley of the shadow of death and come to the light again.

It was courage and self-reliance that did it; but mark where that self-reliance was

found. It was found in God. With my back to the wall I discovered that that wall was God. 'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust.' These were great words to me. I shall never forget them, and I pass them on to you as the secret of courage in the hour of trial.

Barrie makes a fine comment on Henley's splendid lines, written in an hour of great trial in his life. I dare say you all know them:

'In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.'

Barrie tells us that Henley told him they were written in the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, during two years of bitter suffering there. The lines, he says, are a real example of courage. Especially these two—

'Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed,'

make a fine mouthful ; but, he adds, they might be even better thus :

‘Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but bowed.’

What does Barrie mean by that correction ? Does he not mean that the true secret of courage is prayer ; the head not unbowed in defiance, but bowed in resignation and supplication to Him who can make the soul in all things conqueror and more ?

Whatever be his meaning, this is the true secret of courage in the battle of life. It is when the soul casts itself on God that it is enabled to say, ‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.’ ‘I will go in the strength of the Lord,’ and ‘if I perish, I perish.’ Perish ! no man ever perished who went in that strength. ‘I will give unto them,’ says their Captain, ‘eternal life ; and they shall never perish ; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.’

XIII

THE WOMAN WHO WAS NEVER MOURNED

‘Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes . . . yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep.’

EZEKIEL xxiv. 16.

WHO was this woman? Was she one that deserved no tears? There are such, alas! to-day; women so depraved and abandoned, or so cruel and heartless, that the best gift they could give the world would be the story of their death. Like Israel’s king, of them you could say, ‘Departed without being desired.’

No, Ezekiel’s wife was none of these. On the contrary, she is described by the prophet as ‘the desire of his eyes,’ one of ‘the sweetest things that ever grew beside a human door.’ If he wept no tears for her, it was not because his heart refused their passage, but because a higher voice forbade: ‘Son of man, behold, I take away

from thee the desire of thine eyes . . . yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep.'

The prophet was in captivity. He had been carried thither with Jehoiakim and a few nobles some nine years before. The kingdom, however, was not destroyed. Zedekiah was left as a tributary prince. The temple was standing still. Now, however, a terrible change took place. Zedekiah, urged on by his wicked counsellors, rebelled. The great king sent an army against him, and this time no mercy was to be shown. The city was to be invested with fire and sword like a pot boiling on an oven, and so fierce would be the flames, that they would consume the cauldron, thus simmering with iniquity, and all its contents, so that even the metal would be reduced to ashes in the fierce conflagration—an allusion, doubtless, to the destruction of the temple and the ruin of the city.

Now it so happened that Ezekiel had an even more poignant reason than the national loss to remember the day in which this fateful siege of the city was to begin. For it was on the very same day, the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year

of Jehoiakim's captivity, that his wife died. He seems to have loved her passionately. He calls her 'the desire of his eyes,' a phrase indicating a loveliness of face without, that corresponded to a loveliness of soul within.

This wife of Ezekiel has been made the subject of a beautiful poem by a poetess¹ of minor but true poetic quality. The writer lights up the brief story of our chapter with a true imaginative gift. She paints Ezekiel's wife as a true comforter of her husband in his sorrowful vocation. The wife of a prophet has never a very easy task, trying to combine her private duties with a public spirit. Ezekiel's wife had not the tasks of a modern minister's wife. She had no sewing-meeting to attend, no classes to take, no pastoral calls to pay; but she had to keep up her husband's spirit in hard and difficult days. The prophet we know was personally popular. His people thought he had a very pleasant voice and could play well on an instrument. But there his influence ended. He could not

¹ *Ezekiel and Other Poems*, by B. M., said to be a Scotch lady, a daughter of Hugh Miller.

convince them of their sin and misery. He could not lead them into that repentance which he knew to be necessary for their salvation. Nor could he make them realise the awful calamities which impended over their beloved city.

And so often after a busy day's preaching he would come home weary and dispirited, saying, like another even greater than himself, 'I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain.' And it was then that Ezekiel's wife did her part. It was then she would perhaps, as our poetess suggests, sing him one of the songs of Zion, 'the Lord's song in a strange land,' which never sounded so sweet as it did by these waters of Babel; and refreshed by her love and cheered by her voice, his heart and faith would be strengthened, and he would go out to his people with a new courage to denounce, to console, and to inspire.

Now it was on the morning of one of these days—ah! how well does the prophet remember it, the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of their captivity—that there came a double message to his

soul, either half of which had been enough to plunge it in despair. One part of it concerned the beloved city far away across the desert. It was to this effect that the city which he loved was even now being invested by the armies which were never to leave it till they had said : ' Raze, raze it to the ground ! Even to the foundations thereof.' And the other had been that on that very day, ere the sun had set, his beloved wife would be taken away from him by ' a stroke.'

The Bible does not tell us when the latter monition came. But it indicates that it came to him on a Sabbath morning as he was going out to his day's work. The poem I have referred to suggests that it came to him as he was taking leave of her at the gate of his little cottage. With a farewell kiss and good-bye she had gone from him, and then something perhaps in the pallor of her cheek or the tenderness of her voice had struck him, and the message came, ' This day thy beloved, the desire of thine eyes, is to be taken from thee !' For a moment he had resolved to go back and stay with her for the day, but the

foolishness of his fears prevented him, and the recollection that he had an important duty to perform that day, confirmed the resolution. He went on to his task, and never, as it seemed to the people, did he preach with such tremendous power as he did that day, when he described Jerusalem as a boiling-pot seething with the iniquities of many generations, torturing her great prophet Jeremiah because he told them the truth. Her hour had come, the fire was already lit, and soon the pot and all that it contained would be burned away.

And then, as it seemed, the prophet turned to a more tender and personal theme. What had been in the morning but a fear and a premonition, now became an awful conviction. Impelled by an inward force, he told them that that night his wife would be taken from him, and that God had commanded him to make no outward mourning for her, though she was 'the desire of his eyes'; because in the greater and national grief which was impending over the nation, personal and private losses would be forgotten, or at least eclipsed. It would be a national lamentation that

would be needed; nay, more, a national repentance, so that their nation might not be wholly cast away.

Arrived at this poignant climax, the preacher hastily pronounced the benediction and hastened home to his stricken wife. We can fancy what a sensation his strange sermon would arouse and how the people would gather round him in sympathy. But shaking himself free of them he hastened home only to find his worst fears fulfilled. There she lay in the delirium of approaching dissolution. How she had been stricken we do not know. Probably by a sun-stroke, which in these lands is rapidly fatal. At all events, ere the even fell, the prophet's prevision had been fulfilled. She passed away. B. M., the anonymous poetess to whom I have referred, paints her as rousing herself at the last to take a dying farewell of her beloved. He is not to mourn for her. All his thought is to be for the people of whose fortunes he is to be guardian and reconstructor in the troublous years that are to come.

‘He needed me,

‘To be a sign for Him; my death to stand

A figure to my people of the things
Which He will do to them, except they turn
And seek His face. I am so content
To die for this. I could not speak for God
As thou hast done so well; but I can be
To God and for my people and for thee
To aid in thy great work—a sign.'

And so she was. The prophet sternly carried out the divine behest. Next day it was whispered she was dead. But the prophet went about his work as if nothing had happened, and when they questioned and perhaps chided with him about his strange conduct, he reminded them of yesterday's prophecy, and told them that he was a sign of the greater grief that was yet to come, and of their duty when that day came to bear themselves bravely like men, not to sink with despair, but by courage and repentance to prepare the way for a national resurrection in the distant future.

And in this, one is glad to say the prophet was not disappointed. Shortly after tidings came that confirmed the prophet's words. Jerusalem was besieged. By and by more terrible ones came. Jerusalem had fallen and was destroyed. But in that dark hour

the little band of exiles did not utterly despair. Ezekiel became, as he is called, the prophet of the reconstruction. From this time his preaching took a softer and more hopeful turn, and in the Valley of the Drybones he painted before them a future golden with hope, a veritable resurrection from the dead.

Thus the prophet's loss was comforted. He saw it was not in vain. He gained from it the 'far-off interest of tears,' he realised that his wife being dead was yet speaking in him, and that in that better and new Jerusalem he would yet meet her again in an eternal union. There was no need to mourn her now. God was right. He had wiped the tear from off his face so that he could say :

'Far off thou art, yet ever nigh.
I have thee still and I rejoice;
I prosper, circled by thy voice,
I shall not lose thee though I die.'

Now what does the unmourned bride of Ezekiel teach us to-day? Not that we should not mourn for the dead. That would be unnatural, and God is never unnatural. Ezekiel's wife was a special sign, and what

was right and proper for him to do, is not enjoined upon us. But what the experience of the prophet teaches us is this, that *there are times in life when love and duty come into seeming conflict, and that in such times duty should always be paramount.* You all remember the words of the old English poet :

‘I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.’

The poet was thinking of military duty, and we have often had examples in the recent war of how men and women stifled the claims of love in order that they might be true to their country and their king. A higher love overcame their own personal desires, and they went away to die with a smiling face. I read some time ago of a French poet, who, in the war of 1870, left a position of honour to serve as a common soldier in the ranks. He left more than that : one who was dearer to him than life. He was killed not far from Paris, and when his body was carried to the grave it was followed by his beloved. In after years she got over her loss to some extent, and married

another. Yet she never forgot her first love, and got her husband to call her first-born after the dead hero. This boy at the Great War had grown to man's estate and went forth with his mother's approval to face a similar fate. Thus that poor mother has had to face a double bereavement, and yet she has done so freely and even with a proud joy. It is all 'for France.'

And what men and women thus do for patriotism, many do in the less romantic but not less heroic walks of private life. How many a girl like Ezekiel's wife has laid aside the dearest hopes and affections of her heart, in order that she might be true to some higher duty. Is not this in a high sense what the Saviour did when He left His home in heaven, that He might become a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, just that the world might be saved by His sorrow, and find life through His death? Was it not the antinomy of love and duty made Him pray in Gethsemane, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me?' Was it not the victory of the higher duty, or shall we not say the highest love, that made Him answer that

prayer by the words, 'Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done'?

Once more we are reminded by Ezekiel's experience, that *when duty conquers a lover's love, there comes in the end a true compensation, a real consolation.* Ezekiel found in after-days that it was best it should be so. By losing his own personal griefs in the needs of his country, comfort came to his soul. He felt that his wife had not died in vain. She was living in him, and he could say of her, 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.'

Some of you may remember how similar it was with John Bright; how, when his wife was taken from him and he was sitting in the death chamber inconsolable, he felt a hand on his shoulder, and, looking up, saw his friend Richard Cobden beside him; and after the first expressions of sympathy were passed, how Cobden said, 'There are thousands of husbands in England to-day who are mourning dead wives that have died for the lack of bread. Now when your first grief is passed, you will come with me, and we will never rest till the corn

laws are repealed.' It was like a voice from heaven to the great tribune of the people. He went forth from that chamber with a new heaven-born eloquence to plead the cause of the hungry; and in doing that work, found comfort to his wounded heart.

'Wilt thou not tell us,' said Ezekiel's friends, 'what these things are to us, that thou doest so?' We are sometimes tempted to say the same to God when some sharp and sudden vein comes to us such as came to him. But when we go forth like Ezekiel to use our grief in the service and comfort of our fellow-men, the question answers itself, and this is the answer which it gives, 'By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.'

XIV

THE WOMAN WHO WEEPS FOR THE WRONG THING

‘ Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.’—*ST. LUKE* xxiii. 28.

JESUS was out on ‘ the sorrowful way.’ It was part of the inhumanity of His trial, that the journey from judgment to execution had to be trodden forthwith; and in cases of crucifixion the condemned had further to carry on his shoulder the cross on which he was shortly to die. This was the path that was now being taken by the Man of Sorrows. At all times trying, it was specially to Him, because it had been preceded by weeks of tremendous strain and by a night of sleepless agony. Under its pressure, increased by another mysterious burden, whose weight we can never fully fathom, Jesus had fallen half fainting to the ground. Seeing his exhaustion, half in pity, half in desire

to hasten with their task, the soldiers had commandeered a stranger from the country, a visitor probably to the feast, one Simon of Cyrene, 'whom they compelled to bear his Cross.'

The incident apparently touched the sympathies of a part of the hitherto callous crowd. This was the women, who, with their children, had come out to see the last procession of the famous prophet of Galilee. They had come perchance without much compassion in their breasts, for it was not in Jerusalem but in Galilee that Jesus was known and loved. But as they saw the pale and patient sufferer fainting upon the street, as they remembered how gentle He had always been to their sex, how He had rescued the woman taken in adultery, how He had wept for the sisters at Lazarus' grave, how He had said to the mothers, 'Suffer the little children to come unto me'; how in many other ways He had shown Himself the champion of the weak, a gush of sympathy welled up in their breasts, and they gave expression to the shrill cries of lamentation for the dead, although by Jewish law this was forbidden for a

malefactor. 'There followed him a great company of people and of women who also bewailed and lamented Him.'

There is something beautiful about this incident. It is almost the only redeeming feature in a story of unrelieved barbarity. It sheds high honour on womanhood, that, in an hour when hatred and scorn were poured unmingled on the head of Jesus, the women of Jerusalem were not afraid to proclaim themselves His friend.

And in this, I need hardly remind you, these women were not singular. All through His ministry we read of women who befriended Him. In Galilee we hear of women who followed His preaching tours and ministered to Him. In Capernaum there was one who washed His feet with her tears. In Bethany one sat at His feet and heard His word, while another prepared His evening meal. Even in Pilate's house there was one who bade her husband 'have thou nothing to do with that just man'; and when He expired on the Cross, it was women who followed His corpse to its burial, and prepared sweet spices for its anointing.

With her fine instinct, woman perceived

the essential nobility of Jesus; and the services she rendered Him on earth, He was afterwards to repay a hundredfold. Wherever Christianity has gone it has carried with it the spirit of chivalry, and the elevation of womanhood; and if women are as wise to-day as their sisters in the past, they will preserve this attitude of loyalty to their best Friend. It is He who alone can retain for her that spiritual emancipation and true elevation which He won for her long ago when He taught His disciples that in Christ there is neither male nor female.

Jesus must have been comforted by the sympathy of these women. It must have been to Him like a sweet flower in a desert. We can see that in the fact that He stopped the procession, turned round and addressed to them the last extended utterance that came from His earthly lips.

Nevertheless, He does not allow them to be mistaken as to the real moral situation. They were weeping for Him as for one who was in a most woeful plight. So to the outward eye He seemed. Not so, however, to the inward. To the eye of faith He was not going as a felon to His execution. He

was going as a soldier to fight for those He loved; nay, as a king to his coronation. Hence while He addressed them in words of kindness and courtesy, He corrects their misapprehension, and tells them that their sorrow is misplaced. ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.’

There are two things we learn from these words of Jesus here: *first*, what we ought not to weep for as we behold His sufferings; and *secondly*, what we ought to weep for. We ought not to weep for Him: we ought rather to weep for ourselves.

I. ‘Weep not for me,’ says Christ. That seems an extraordinary thing to say, for if ever there was a sight calculated to draw forth the tears of sympathy, it was Jesus on the Via Dolorosa. ‘Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow?’ He who would look forth on this callous and unmoved is surely devoid of human feeling.

‘Have we no tears to weep for Him,
While foes revile and men deride?’

Of course, such feeling is natural and proper. I have said that I believe Christ accepted these women's tears with gratitude and refreshment, and I hold to that view, though some rigid commentators see in His words only a rebuke. But surely the fact that Jesus stood and addressed His sympathisers, calling them by the honourable epithet—Daughters of Jerusalem—proves that Jesus was deeply touched by their womanly sympathy. He who was silent to Herod was not silent to them.

No, sympathy with the Divine sorrow is natural and right, and may lead to deeper things. But what Jesus means here is, that if these women could see deeper, they would understand that there was nothing in Him to make them weep. He was only completing the task which God had given Him to do—the grandest task that had ever been set to the hands of mankind to do, the salvation of it from the guilt and the power of sin. And now the end of that work is in sight. The worst is o'er. The goal is in sight and He can say, 'I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me

to do.' This is no time for tears. 'Weep not for me.'

There is a fine picture by Giotto, which brings out this conception of the joy of the way to Calvary. It is a picture of 'Jesus bearing His Cross.' The expression of Christ's face is one of high elation. It surprises you and seems almost unnatural, so merry is it in its gladness, until you remember what the Master said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me.' Giotto has caught the same idea as the writer to the Hebrews when he says, 'Now we see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus for the suffering of death'—the word 'for' means not 'on account of,' but 'with a view to'—'we see Jesus on the way to death crowned with glory and honour.'

These daughters of Jerusalem are the sisters of those to-day who see in the Cross only a matter for sentimental emotion. They weep over the Cross much as a woman to-day would weep over a pathetic novel. Such tears are idle. They have no moral value. They lead to no moral reformation. As such they are rejected by Christ. What in the daughters of Jerusalem was

natural and praiseworthy is worthless to-day, and almost worse than worthless in the clearer light of the Resurrection. To the believing soul the Cross is more a theme for song than a subject for tears. And if it is right and proper to sing softly, 'He was despised and rejected of men,' the Messiah should always end with a 'Hallelujah chorus'; for

'The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now.'

'Weep not for me.'

II. This brings us, in the second place, to consider *the tears that Jesus would have us shed* as we behold His Cross. 'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For the days will come when they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?'

In these words Jesus speaks as a *patriot*. He beholds in vision the holy city passing

away in blood and flame. Ere that generation had wholly gone, such horror would be enacted in the spot on which He stood as would make history shudder. Under that impending doom He has special sympathy for the women and children. War, which presses hardly on the women and children at all times, does so most cruelly in a city besieged. Looking at the innocent babes in their arms, He foretells these mothers of a time when even they might cease to have compassion on the sons of their womb, and under the stress of the famine that prevailed might be compelled to deliver them up to the butcher's knife. Such things, Josephus tells us, actually happened, and he closes his terrible narrative with the words, 'There never has been a race on earth, and there never will be one, whose sufferings can be matched with those of Jerusalem in the days of the siege.'

But while Jesus speaks here as a patriot, He speaks still more as a *judge*. 'If these things,' he closes, 'are done in a green tree, what should be done in the dry?' Without any self-consciousness He could truly call Himself a green tree. Young,

innocent of wrong, seeking only the good of mankind, He had been hunted down by the fury of the priests, and cast into the fire of their jealous hatred. If God permitted such things to be done to Him, what would He permit the Romans to do to a tree that was withered and dead. For that was what the nation had become. It had been planted originally as a green tree in the garden of the Lord; but it had failed to bring forth fruits to His glory. It had gradually been desiccated by formalism and hypocrisy, until now it stood stark and bare on Mount Moriah, a relic of a faith that once was fair and fruitful, but now was fit only for the burning.

Weep not for me, says Christ, but weep for these things, and weep not the tears of mere patriotic sorrow, but weep the tears of penitence and shame. Weep for your sins, the sin which has rejected Me and handed Me to this cross. Let not your tears flow for a suffering man, but rather go home to smite your breasts for the sins which are bringing you and your nation to ruin.'

Whether this last call to repentance had

any moral result, we do not know. Let us hope it had, and that among the five thousand who, at Peter's great Pentecostal sermon delivered a few weeks after this, smote their breasts and cried out: 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' there may have been some of these daughters of Jerusalem who now bedewed His path with the tears of a merely sentimental emotion.

But the lesson He would teach is not for an age, but for all time. The tears Jesus would have us shed as we stand in thought beneath His Cross must be deeper than those of pity; they must be tears of conviction, they must be the tears of the conscience.

Such tears may be in one case both national and individual. We, too, have had cause in our land, and in other lands, to weep many tears recently for the agonies and bereavements of war. Every village has its war memorial expressive of these tears of a nation's sorrows. But unless these tears lead us into a new path of world politics, what avail these tears? During the Genoa Conference, Punch had

a fine cartoon showing Europe in the guise of an old and weary traveller, painfully staggering along by the side of a dark forest. At the edge of it, a man with a fierce countenance points to a pathway through it, above which there is a signpost with the words, 'Suspicion, National Jealousy, Armaments.' 'This is the way,' he cries. But the toilworn traveller wearily turns away his head and trends onward on a dusty, uphill road, on which the signboard marks, 'To national goodwill.' 'No,' he says, 'I have tried that way before, I'll have no more of it.'

A true message. What boots it to weep tears for the dead, if we do not lay to heart the message they left with us as they went out to die. 'We war to make an end of war!'

And the same is true of the individual. It is natural and proper to stand with silent reverence before the Cross. It is right to sing with melting heart :

'See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.'

But unless such emotions lead us further, to contrition for the sins which made Him

die ; to moral reformation of the coldness, the indifference, the selfishness which He came to put an end to, what boots such tears ? Weep not for Me, says Jesus to us, weep for yourselves. Weep for the things that crucify Me to-day afresh and put Me to an open shame. Weep these tears the Magdalene wept when she knelt at His feet and confessed her sin. Weep those tears which Peter wept when he went out into the night of denial and wept bitterly ; these are the tears I desire, these are the sorrows My Cross would fain arouse in your breast. It is of these that I spoke specially, when I said, ‘ Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.’

‘ A broken heart, a fount of tears,
Ask, and they will not be denied ;
A broken heart love’s cradle is,
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified.’

Tennyson sings somewhere about the foolishness of ‘ idle tears.’ Tears may be the fountainhead of the river of purpose, or lead only into a stagnant marsh of un-availing sorrow.

Be sure when you weep, that you do not weep for the wrong things.

XV

THE GIRL WHO WAS CALLED 'MAD'

'They said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so.'—Acts xii. 15.

WHEN Rhoda had been first cradled, she had received from her parents a beautiful name, the sweetest in all the world—'Rose.' But when she grew up, and her mother was with her no more, she was called by a different and not so pleasant a one. She was called *Manias*, which means 'a mad woman.' They said, 'Thou art mad.'

How had poor Rhoda come to receive this unpleasant distinction? We know why the world calls girls mad to-day. Sometimes because they refuse to marry a man with an income of four figures; just because they do not love him, because he is a bad character, or because of some other such flimsy reason! Then it says, 'You are a fool to refuse such a good offer. You're daft to refuse the Laird o' Cockpen.'

Sometimes the reason may be more weighty. We see a girl, out of sheer bravado, or entranced with the love of adventure, or the lure of gold, embarking on hazardous journeys and perilous seas, leaving home to face grave moral temptations, or have her fine nature soiled by association with coarse men on public platforms, and then we say, perhaps more justly, 'Poor girl! She thinks she is wise to despise the advice of parents and friends; but she will come one day to see how foolish she is. She is mad to do such a thing.'

But it was for none of these reasons Rhoda was accused of madness. No, the reason was a strange one, and strangest of all, on account of the quarter from which it came. It was because she believed with all her young heart in God; believed implicitly in the power of prayer.

Go back to the scene of our text for a moment. It is a prayer meeting that is before us at the deepest hour of night. A company of the early Christians are met in the house of Mary, the sister of Barnabas, praying earnestly for a precious life. Herod has stretched forth the sword of persecu-

tion over their heads. The first of those ten persecutions which were to try the early Christians through three centuries of hate and give the Church a new aristocracy, 'the noble army of martyrs,' has fallen upon the Church of Jerusalem. Already St. James the greater has drunk the cup prophesied for him by his Lord, and now Peter is to follow. To-morrow the great leader of their company is to be led forth to die. It is indeed a crisis. If the shepherd be smitten, will not the sheep be scattered abroad? With earnest intercessions, therefore, they are gathered, entreating their Lord to have mercy upon them.

And their petitions are heard. Their prayers are answered. In the very midst of their intercessions a loud knock is heard. It is strange, however, that to none of them in that meeting does it seem to have occurred that this was an answer. On the contrary, it only increased their fears. They heard in it only the loud summons of the soldiers of Herod, making a fresh inroad on the flock, bursting their way into their midst; to lead fresh prisoners to torture and to death. And so instead

of rushing to the door, they sit in terror crying, 'What shall we do? Whither shall we flee? Is there any way of escape?'

But in that fearful gathering there was one who retained her presence of mind. This was Rhoda, and the fact that her name is Greek, has led some to think that she was a Greek slave, and had come from Cyprus, where we know that her mistress had great possessions. If it was so, it makes her story all the more beautiful. For the fact that she was at the prayer meeting, and that she knew Peter's voice and hailed it with joy, makes it almost certain she was a Christian; so that she was the first slave to gain that 'liberty' which Christ came to proclaim to the captives.

However that may be, Rhoda is the only one who retains her presence of mind in that timid company. Instead of talking of escaping by the back door, she asks herself, 'Would it not be well to find out who is at the front?' And so she slips from the room, runs across the courtyard, which always formed the hall of an ancient house, and stands at the great gate where

Peter is standing loudly knocking, knowing that delays are dangerous for him then.

But though delays are dangerous for Peter, they are very far from dangerous for Rhoda. 'Who is there?' she asks, and she is right to do so. 'Never open a door in the dark until you know who is behind it,' is a good caution for all young girls. Above all, keep the door of your heart shut, until you know the kind of man that is knocking there. It may be a Peter, but it may also be a Herod. So Rhoda calls out, 'Who is there?' and then came the answer which its author had heard before on Galilean waves, 'It is I, Rhoda, be not afraid.'

'Peter!' she cries to herself. Yes, none other than he. Oh! what news to give; and so, forgetful of the poor man outside, 'for joy she opened not the door'; but fled to tell the glad news. 'Isn't it like a girl?' you would say; and yet wrong too. For while she was running with her glad news, Herod's soldiers might have come down the street, and then there would have been a second and sadder surprise when she went back a second time.

Never forget the imperativeness of duty in the midst of a joy or a sorrow, however natural or legitimate. If your duty be to open the door, open it first before you begin to preach. The best service you can do to your Lord is to do the duty that lies nearest you.

But it is not with Rhoda's thoughtlessness that I wish specially to deal to-day, it is with the reception her news experienced when she burst in with the glad tidings—'Peter is escaped! Peter is at the door'; they said, 'Thou art mad!'

Notice the fact that these people were met together praying for the very thing that Rhoda is called mad for announcing. There they are praying with all their might that the Great Shepherd of the Sheep would save their chief under-shepherd, that He would put forth His hand to deliver their beloved pastor; and yet when the news is brought them, they say, 'Thou art mad!'

I. Now what does that teach us? *Does it not teach us, in the first place, that there is often a great deal of unbelief mingling with our prayers?* Here were these people pray-

ing with all their might for Peter, and yet when Peter comes they do not believe it.

I do not doubt the sincerity of their prayers. I am sure they believed in them. Possibly they hoped that an answer, if it did come, would do so by a reprieve in the morning. Possibly they had sent a largely signed petition for mercy to Herod, and hoped it would be favourably answered at the last moment; but that it should come this way is beyond their expectations. They said, 'She is mad!'

Is not this a common experience still? We read of George Muller of Bristol supporting an orphan institution by no other means than believing prayer, and we say, 'How wonderful!' 'Has it come to this,' asks Spurgeon, 'that it is a marvellous thing to believe in the promises of God and something like a miracle for God to fulfil them? If the Lord wants to surprise His people, He has only at once to give them an answer. No sooner do they receive an answer than they say, 'Who would have thought it?' I like better the remark of a godly woman who, hearing of a remarkable answer to prayer, supplemented

by the remark, 'Is it not wonderful?' replied, 'No, it is just like *Him*.'

II. But in the second place, I see in this incident an illustration of the common truth, that *if a man believes enthusiastically in Jesus Christ and His power to save, he is likely some time to be accused of madness.*

Rhoda is in good company. She is not the first who was accused of madness because she believed in God with all her heart. All down the history of the Church men and women have been called insane because they believed in God with all their heart and acted as if they did.

It was said of the Founder of Christianity Himself, when he was at the height of His work, His brethren wanted to take Him away and confine Him at home. They said, 'He is beside Himself.' It was said of His greatest apostle. As Paul preached before Festus and his eye kindled with the glory of his message, Festus leaned forward and said, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad.' It was said of John Wesley, as he preached to the miners of Ringwood, and the air

rang with their cries of penitence. The world looked on and said, 'A party of lunatics escaped from Bedlam.'

The world has no quarrel with Christianity in itself. Its quarrel is with Christianity in earnest. It likes religion if you do not give it too much of it. It wants to be married in its churches, and baptised by its ministers, and have the burial service read over its grave. But it is a serious quarrel with Christianity when it becomes earnest. Its attitude to faith is the attitude of Talleyrand—'Above all, no zeal.' It likes its religion as the Americans like their water, with a good lump of ice in it; and whenever it sees it rising to blood heat, it turns away in disgust and says, 'How vulgar!'

Have you ever been thought mad for Christ? I wish there was more of that madness to-day. I once looked at the Chicago Corn Exchange on a day of panic, and as I saw men shouting and screaming, it seemed to me the maddest thing I had witnessed. If that had taken place in a church, the lunacy doctor would have been called for, but because it was in the Corn Exchange of Chicago, it was 'just business.'

Never be ashamed to be enthusiastic for Christ. You are in the best of company if men sneer at you for religion. They have done it ever since Christ lived, and they will do it to the end. But 'wisdom is justified of her children,' and the insanity of one generation has often been the wisdom of the next.

III. But in the third place, *note what Rhoda did with this accusation of insanity.* Was she overcome by it? Was she brow-beaten into silence? Did she humbly submit, saying, 'Well, I must be wrong? It was not Peter after all I suppose, but some night-walker of the streets, some drunken man, or some officer of Herod?' Not at all. Although she was only a humble servant girl, she was not cowed by the criticism of that large company. On the contrary, 'she constantly affirmed that it was even so,' like Athanasius holding to her position, even if she were alone against the world.

And what was the reason of that constancy? It was, of course, the force of her own experience. She had the testi-

mony of her senses to back her. Nothing could move her from that position. She had recognised the voice of Peter. 'She constantly affirmed that it was even so.'

Now we learn from that constancy this great truth, *the value of a great experience in religious testimony*. We live in a world, as I have said, which may often meet our religious testimony with scepticism and even ridicule. But if we have behind our testimony the force of a real experience of God, then we can meet it like Rhoda, with a courage which nothing can daunt.

Max Müller once said, 'Religion is above all things an experience, and the man who knows nothing of religion as that, knows nothing of it in his soul.' That is so, and yet the lamentable fact about many of our young Christians to-day, is that they have no experience of Christ at all. Although Christ has been knocking at their doors as Peter was hammering at the door of Mary, they have never heard His voice, they have never let Him in. Will you not seek, my brethren, my sisters, for this experience? It can be found for the seeking, if the seeking is earnest enough. It

can be found as Rhoda found it by continuing long in prayer, saying to God what Jacob said, 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.' Then He will come to your door and give you that assurance which Rhoda had. 'Ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.'

IV. Last of all, we see how the *constancy of Rhoda was crowned at the last.*

'Peter continued knocking'—that was what gave her the victory. When they could not move her from her testimony, they were tempted to call her 'voice' a message from the dead. 'It is his angel.' Peter then was dead. The execution had already taken place. This was a farewell message as his spirit passed into the silent land. But the continued knocking of Peter stifled that decision. There was something insistently human about that knocking, and so they went to see, and then came the glad meeting, and prayer was changed to praise.

'Peter continued knocking'—that is the value of a great experience. It continues

knocking, knocking at 'the door of your heart long after it has taken place. It is ever with you. You cannot forget it. It assures God's presence to you 'for many days.'

Have you had any experience of Christ, my brother? He has been knocking at your heart's door for long. He is still knocking to-night. Will you not hear Him and open the door? It is an experience like that, that gives you the red rose of courage which Rhoda wore so beautifully on her breast, when 'she constantly affirmed that it was even so.'

XVI

THE WOMAN WHO GOT HER HEART OPENED

‘Lydia . . . whose heart the Lord opened.’—Acts xvi. 14.

THE story of Lydia’s conversion, though short and seemingly unimportant, must always interest us as the case of *the first European convert*. You all know how St. Paul was divinely guided to this work by the Holy Spirit, how the wonderful Vision of the Man of Macedonia led him from the shores of Asia across the Ægean to the unknown lands of the West. It is quite clear from that vision that the Spirit of God meant to teach Paul that the step he was taking was of signal importance. Christianity was entering on another and still more wonderful chapter.

Yet when he arrived at the scene of his future conquests no sign of them at first appeared. No ‘Man of Macedonia’ was

waiting him on the shore. Europe was in perfect indifference to the Gospel. The Vision of Troas seemed to end in failure. There was not even a Jewish synagogue in Philippi—only a *proseuche*, or prayer-meeting place, by a river-side, where the Jews resorted on the Sabbath day.

Now it was in the synagogue that Christian missions were usually born. The Jews in these earlier days were the nucleus out of which the Church took its origin. It must have therefore been with no little discouragement that Paul went out on the Sabbath morning to this little meeting. He must have felt it strange that the Holy Spirit should have guided him to so unfruitful a field. But he was too strong a believer in His leadings to hesitate as to the line of action he must pursue; and so though there was not a single man in the meeting that day, he opened his mouth with his usual fervour and enthusiasm and preached Christ to the Jewish women gathered there on that eventful day.

A strange place for the first sermon preached in Europe! No grand cathedral with vaulted roof or pealing organ. No

building at all ; but just a few trees at a river-side, where some women were gathered for prayer. But there was One there that made it better than any cathedral which did not possess Him. God's Spirit was there ; and so we read that among these women there was one whose heart *the Lord* opened, so that she 'attended to the things which were spoken of Paul,' and was straightway baptised and her household.

I. Let us look at this woman for a little to-night, and, first of all, let us note from her story the significant truth, that *the heart of man is naturally closed to Christ*.

Her heart had to be 'opened,' like a closed door or a shut flower, ere the truth of the Gospel could shine into it with its illuming and beautifying rays. This is all the more significant, because we see from the context that she was naturally a good woman. She was not like the Philippian gaoler, whose story follows hers, a godless and abandoned character. She was, on the contrary, a proselyte—that is, a seeker after the true God ; like the Roman

centurion and the Ethiopian eunuch. Living in a city of idolatry, she had cast her idols away and worshipped the God of Abraham with devoutness and sincerity, coming every Sabbath morning to that place 'where prayer was wont to be made.'

But though Lydia was an earnest seeker after God, it is clearly implied in the narrative that her heart was firmly closed to Christ. The striking phrase used, 'Whose heart the Lord opened,' indicates, I think, that she had already heard something about the new teaching, and was definitely determined against it. At all events, it points to a struggle. The heart was closed to the Gospel, and could only be opened by the Lord Himself.

It may seem strange that one should be devout and prayerful and yet closed to Christ. But it is often true. We read in a previous chapter of 'devout and honourable women' as the chief persecutors of Paul and Silas. A man may be outwardly good, and even inwardly religious, and yet have a heart closed to the Gospel. There are many in all our churches who are regular in their attendance, correct and moral in

life, and yet know nothing of the saving power of the grace of God in Christ. When you speak to them, they turn away in disgust or incredulity. Their hearts have never experienced the saving power of the Cross at all. The words, 'atonement,' 'justification,' 'sanctification,' are utterly without meaning. Their minds are shut with the *bar of ignorance*. They are like that striking character Bunyan describes in the *Pilgrim's Progress*—'Ignorance.' They are destroyed for lack of knowledge. And by knowledge I do not mean book learning, such as grammar or history or mathematics; I mean the knowledge of God, the knowledge of Christ. These things they cannot understand, and they don't want to understand them. They call them 'dry doctrines,' and ask why Christianity cannot be preached more simply.

Then, too, there is the *bar of prejudice*. When 'Christian' tried to instruct 'Ignorance,' he went away in a huff. 'I cannot go so fast as you,' he said. Such people are prejudiced against all evangelical preaching, and simply will not listen to it. This bar of prejudice lies heavy across the door

of many a well-intentioned and even kindly heart to-day.

Or it may be *the bar of evil passion*. The heart is like that of that poor possessed damsel, of whom we read later on. She wanted to be saved. She wanted to be free. But she could not. She was held in the grasp of an evil spirit. So there are many to-day longing to be free. Oh, how one yearns for them! Yearns to push back the heavy iron bar that imprisons their spirit. But alas! we cannot do it of ourselves. Only One can do it. 'This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.' 'Whose heart the Lord opened.'

II. This brings us to the second thought suggested by the story of Lydia. *It is only God that can open the heart*. 'Whose heart *the Lord* opened.'

It was not Paul who opened this woman's heart. He could not do that. Paul might 'plant,' but God alone could give the 'increase.' This He does either by opening our minds to understand His word, or by applying His word to suit our minds.

Thus in the Emmaus journey the first

method is employed. Christ opens their minds to understand the Scriptures. He shows them the meaning of what before was darkness, so that their hearts burn with light and joy.

In the case of St. Augustine again, He suits His word to the mind. '*Take up and read,*' cries a voice, as of children at play in a garden, near which Augustine is sitting with his Bible thrown aside in utter despair, because his sins seem too strong for him to get free. 'O wretched man,' he cries, 'who shall deliver me from this body of death?' And then he hears the child's voice again, '*Take up and read ; take up and read !*' He takes up the book again, opens it, and lo, the words meet his eyes, 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,' and it seems as if the chains fall from his feet. The heavy bar of passion rolls across the door and his soul is free, for ever free !

How exactly the Spirit opened the door of Lydia's heart we do not know. Probably it was the first method He used. For we read, that 'she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul.' Now the things Paul usually spoke of were

‘Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that believe Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.’ As a Jewish proselyte from a Greek race, such a message exactly suited her. It interpreted the Scriptures to her in a way she had never before understood them, and gave her also a new power to live that life of holiness, for which she had long striven, but hitherto unsuccessfully. At all events, a joyful assent rang through her heart as she said to herself, ‘This is the Gospel for me.’ The door of her heart flew open. The Lord ‘opened her heart.’

It was the Lord Who did it; but do not forget that there was a human agency in it too. ‘She *attended* unto the things which were spoken of Paul.’ She did not shut her ears to the message. She did not put it aside as a new doctrine. No, she gave her willing attention to it by rolling aside the bar of prejudice from her heart’s door.

In determining the marches between what is divine and human in the conversion of a soul, we are on debatable land;

but we can at least say this, that whatever may be due to the Holy Spirit in inclining and enabling the heart of man to open the soul, the latch is always on *our* side of the door. Jesus stands there and knocks. He can and does clear away 'the weeds and ivy vine' which may be on its outside. His lamp of truth may penetrate through the soiled windows of our soul into the still more soiled soul within; but it is ours, and ours only, to unlatch the door. We must attend to the things spoken of God; we must respond; we must, like Lydia, welcome and admit. The heart of man has a *bar* on the *outside* and a *latch within*. God only can roll aside the bar; but we must lift the latch.

III. Let us look, lastly, at *the results of Lydia's conversion on her conduct and character*.

These are briefly indicated; yet they are wonderfully comprehensive. There is, first, *confession*. 'She was baptised.' Baptism in these early times was the symbol of confession. It was the way in which the convert said to his fellow-men, 'I am not

ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.' To-day, when all men in civilised countries are nominally Christians, it is, of course, no longer so, except in Baptist churches. But still, the Christian has abundant ways of confessing his Lord. Still by coming to join the Church and sitting down at the Lord's table; still by proclaiming himself a new creature, and refusing to join in the old compromising and defiling usages of his former life—the heart that is opened to Christ may proclaim its new allegiance.

And not until it has done so is it strong and free. 'An unconfessed Christian is an unpossessed Christian.' 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation'—and that because confession relieves us from these old compromising situations in which our conscience is defiled and our Christian liberty is endangered. The reality of Lydia's conversion is shown by her confession.

Further, she was not only baptised herself, but *her household as well*. This is one of those texts which those who believe in adult baptism only, find it hard to

explain. For there is no mention of her household believing also; and, indeed, no time for it to take place. She was evidently a widow with a family of young children, and she resolved to bring them in with her at once into the household of faith. We here see the importance of *Family Religion*. If a man or woman is truly right with God, he will strive with all his might to make his children the same. Catherine Booth used to say passionately, 'I will not have a wicked child,' and she never had one. Is there not a falling off here in many of our so-called Christian homes? There are not a few, I fear, in which the name of Christ is never mentioned. Family prayers are forgotten. Even the grace at meals is pretermitted. If you wish religion to continue in the land, begin at home. Luther truly said, 'The fireside is the centre of Christianity,' and if the fire of Christ's love is not burning there, how can it ever reach the circumference?

Last of all, Lydia's 'open heart' was a *generous heart*. As soon as she was converted, she invited Paul and his companions to share the hospitality of her home. This at first the apostle was re-

luctant to do. He did not wish to be thought a preacher for money or bread. But she constrained him, saying, 'If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there.'

Than this evidence of a changed heart, there is none which appeals more to the world. It has often been denied by critics of Christianity, and perhaps sometimes with a certain amount of truth. It has to be admitted that there are not a few loud professors of Christian faith who show little of Christian love in their relations with their fellow-men. If it is so, however, it is not the fault of Christianity in itself, but of those who pretend to its name. If there is one thing clear in the New Testament, it is its insistence on the truth that if a man love God he must love his brother also.

But while there may be many sad exceptions to this rule, the world is too apt to forget that these are only exceptions, and that the cases of those whose heart has been opened by Christianity to generous deeds infinitely outnumber those who have accepted its creed but whose lives deny its power.

Just the other day I was reading a book

which adds another to the fine tales of heroism and sacrifice which missionary annals possess. It was the record of a doctor in West Africa who left the brightest prospects at home in order to pursue a life of hardship and loneliness on the banks of a lonely river in one of the most degraded parts of that suffering continent. Some years ago there were few names in theological circles more brilliant in promise than that of Albert Schweitzer, professor of theology in Strasburg University. His book on *The Quest after the Historical Jesus* had surprised every one by its originality. In musical circles, too, he was no less remarkable as the interpreter of Bach, and the author of the greatest book on that master of sacred music. Yet, to the surprise of all, he left these things to become a medical missionary. He set himself to study medicine for that object, and after gaining his degree went out to labour in the French Mission in Equatorial Africa, in the year 1913.

What led him to this ? In a little book he has recently published,¹ he tells us. It was Christ's Parable on the Rich Man and

¹ *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* (A. and C. Black).

Lazarus. 'The Parable of Dives and Lazarus,' he says, 'seemed to me to have been spoken directly of us. We are Dives, for, through the advantages of medical science, we now know a great deal about disease and pain, and have innumerable means of fighting them, yet we take as a matter of course the innumerable advantages which this new wealth gives us. Out there in the colonies, however, sits Lazarus, wretched, suffering from illness and pain, with absolutely no means of fighting them. And just as Dives sinned against the poor man at his gate, because for want of thought he never put himself in his place and let his heart tell him what he ought to do, so do we sin against the poor man at our gate.'

Urged by this thought, Schweitzer has lived for nearly ten years among these poor suffering people. The record of his achievements he has told modestly but convincingly in the little book. It is a noble vindication of missions from every point of view, both human and divine. And has he not had his reward? Let his own words testify as he recounts the joy of these poor sufferers, when through some surgical operation they have passed from

agony and a seemingly certain death into peace and life.

‘The operation¹ is finished, and in the hardly lighted dormitory I watch for the sick man’s awaking. Scarcely has he recovered consciousness, when he stares about and ejaculates again and again, ‘I’ve no more pain! I’ve no more pain!’ His hand feels for mine and will not let it go. Then I tell him and the others in the room that it is the Lord Jesus who has told the doctor and his wife to come to Ogowai, and that white people in Europe give them money to live here and cure sick negroes. Then I have to answer questions as to who these white people are, and how they know the natives suffer so. The African sun is shining through the coffee bushes into the dark shed, but we, black and white, sit side by side and feel we know by experience the meaning of the words, “*And all ye are brethren.*” Would that my generous friends in Europe could come out here and live through one such hour!’

Yes; may such an ‘opened’ heart be ours, that we too may enter into its joy!

¹ Strangulated hernia.

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